



Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Renaissance Italy

Edited by Jacqueline Murray
and Nicholas Terpstra

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SEX, GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Renaissance Italy explores the new directions being taken in the study of sex and gender in Italy from 1300 to 1700 and highlights the impact that recent scholarship has had in revealing innovative ways of approaching this subject.

In this interdisciplinary volume, twelve scholars of history, literature, art history, and philosophy use a variety of both textual and visual sources to examine themes such as gender identities and dynamics, sexual transgression and sexual identities in leading Renaissance cities. It is divided into three sections, which work together to provide an overview of the influence of sex and gender in all aspects of Renaissance society from politics and religion to literature and art. Part I: Sex, Order, and Disorder deals with issues of law, religion, and violence in marital relationships; Part II: Sense and Sensuality in Sex and Gender considers gender in relation to the senses and emotions; and Part III: Visualizing Sexuality in Word and Image investigates gender, sexuality, and erotica in art and literature.

Bringing to life this increasingly prominent area of historical study, *Sex, Gender and Sexuality in Renaissance Italy* is ideal for students of Renaissance Italy and early modern gender and sexuality.

Jacqueline Murray is Professor of History at the University of Guelph. Her research focuses on premodern sexuality, at the intersections of ecclesiastical and popular lay culture, and she is currently examining the premodern experience of masculinity and male embodiment.

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*Edited by Jacqueline Murray
and Nicholas Terpstra*

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Dedication

This collection is dedicated to Konrad Eisenbichler, a true Renaissance man who produces bold and prodigious scholarship in multiple research areas with grace, ease, and erudition. For Konrad, sociability is correlated with scholarship. He has spent his career creating communities and networks of scholars around the world. These networks have been brought together through his tireless work for learned societies, publication series, and journals. Konrad not only produces scholarship but is also heavily invested in disseminating the scholarship of others.

Scholarly interests often have unusual and serendipitous origins. In a certain sense, this collection began with a codpiece. Konrad's first scholarly contribution to the field of sex, gender, and sexuality in Renaissance Italy developed out of a casual conversation with a colleague who provided enthusiastic encouragement. What resulted was a presentation playfully entitled "The Dynastic Codpiece" to the Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies in 1987. He revised and published it as "Agnolo Bronzino's Portrait of Guidobaldo II della Rovere" (*Renaissance and Reformation*, 1988), an article still cited thirty years later. In this truly groundbreaking interdisciplinary piece, Konrad examined the overly large codpieces worn by Renaissance men for the social and familial messages they conveyed, showing how the messages passed between the generations in competing dynastic portraits. The article established Konrad as a new and powerful voice in the study of sex, gender, and sexuality in the Italian Renaissance. It also illustrated beautifully how his scholarship is inherently interdisciplinary, bridging and incorporating history and literature with artistic representations.

Konrad greets friends, colleagues, and students with warmth, good humor, and generosity. A significant manifestation of his academic hospitality is revealed in the multitude of conferences he has organized: forty between 1983 and 2018. These are special events, international in nature, and reflecting the host-organizer's generosity. They are venues conducive to the exchange of ideas and the formation of friendships. It is most appropriate that the most recent of these focused on "Early Modern Cultures of Hospitality." The themes generally reflect Konrad's sense of the discipline and where it is going; these conferences most often culminate in a significant collection of essays, including *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West* (1996; co-edited with Jacqueline Murray) which helped to promote the study of sex, gender, and sexuality in the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

Konrad has made myriad contributions to individuals and institutions. His contributions to Renaissance scholarship span social history, women's history, religious history, and literature. He publishes equally in Italian and English,

moving easily between scholarly cultures. A scholar with a global reach, he interacts with colleagues spread across North America, to Italy and Europe more broadly, as well as Australia and South Africa. The heart of his many contributions to the study of Italian Renaissance society lies in his research on sex, gender, and sexuality. In recognition of that, some of his friends and colleagues joined to celebrate Konrad's creativity, scholarship, and friendship with essays that demonstrate the creative developments in the field since that fateful cod-piece three decades ago. We are honored to dedicate this volume to Konrad Eisenbichler in recognition of his extraordinary contribution to Renaissance society and culture.

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We are honored to have worked with you all.

Jacqueline Murray
Nicholas Terpstra

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Jacqueline Murray is Professor of History at the University of Guelph. Her research focuses on premodern sexuality, at the intersections of ecclesiastical and popular lay culture. She is co-editor of *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West* (1996), *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West* (1999), and *Marriage in Premodern Europe: Italy and Beyond* (2012). Her current research examines the premodern experience of masculinity and male embodiment. She is an award-winning teacher and one of Canada's 3M National Teaching Fellows, and has held the Donald Bullough Fellowship in Mediaeval History at St Andrew's University.

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Interpretation of the Reformation (2015) and *Cultures of Charity: Women, Politics, and the Reform of Poor Relief in Renaissance Italy* (2013), which won the Marraro Prize of the American Historical Association and the Ruth Goodhart Gordan Prize of the Renaissance Society of America. He has also co-edited *Mapping Space, Sense, and Movement in Florence: Historical GIS and the Early Modern City* with Colin Rose (2016).

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SEX, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY IN RENAISSANCE ITALY

Themes and approaches in recent scholarship

Jacqueline Murray and Nicholas Terpstra

From the mid-nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, the Italian Renaissance was approached almost exclusively as a period of learning, elegance, and manners as reflected by the arts and letters of the time. In *The Book of the Courtier* Castiglione's perfect courtier embodied *virtù* and *sprezzatura*, the two qualities that epitomized Renaissance masculinity. Elite men were celebrated for their bravado, skill, and insouciant nonchalance, whether these were exercised on the fields of battle, the production of art or poetry, or the seduction of women. Castiglione also details the qualities of the ideal court lady, a woman valued for her beauty and affability along with her manners, intellect, and ability to please men. These qualities were appreciated equally in another group of notable women, the courtesans whose beauty and literary accomplishments were acclaimed by poets and artists alike. Thanks in part to the enduring influence of Jakob Burckhardt's *Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy* (1860; English translation 1878), this idealized portrayal of sixteenth-century Italian men and women dominated twentieth-century historiography and shaped how a number of generations understood sex, gender, and sexuality in the Renaissance.

The idealized creations of Castiglione and Burckhardt, their princes and poets, court ladies and courtesans, appeared as the bright stars in the Renaissance firmament, and contributed to the lure of the field. Yet all along they were chimeras, stereotypes created by Renaissance elites and perpetuated by modern scholars of Renaissance culture. Even when individuals appeared to embody these ideal qualities, they were the exceptions, standing apart from thousands of their contemporaries, urban and rural, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, respectable and disreputable. The idealized courtier, court lady, and courtesan obscure everyday life in Renaissance Italy.

In the 1970s, scholars began to ask new questions that ultimately led to a recalibration of research on the history of sex, gender, and sexuality in the

Renaissance. One of the earliest collections was *Human Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (edited by Douglas Radcliff-Umstead, 1978), which includes topics that are wide ranging and represent a variety of disciplinary perspectives. They include sexuality within marriage, sexual sins and eroticism, celibacy, hermaphrodites, homosexuality, and how the human body was understood. These essays from the 1970s foreground important questions about sex, gender, and sexuality in the past. Yet their scope and insights are constrained. Most essays are based on close, summative readings of literary texts from Dante and Chaucer to Shakespeare and other imaginative authors, but these close readings of texts lack the contextualization or critical perspective to enhance their insights. While the occasional essay engages with multiple sources and genres, the absence of critical theoretical and interdisciplinary analysis inhibits the development of a more comprehensive picture of how issues of human sexuality were actually addressed at this time. Significantly, however, the authors did identify emerging themes that would become central to the study of sex, gender, and sexuality. This collection opened the way to the study of topics such as the nature of the sexed human body, the complexities of celibacy as a sexuality, and the fluidity of sexualities and genders. While prescient in research subjects, the authors did not employ the theoretical and methodological tools that developed soon after publication, tools that were necessary for deeper and more complex analyses of sex, gender, and sexuality.

These tools were being forged with the new theories and methodologies of the 1970s that were opening new research subjects and that led to innovations and new definitions of the individual and the self. A series of studies in that decade revolutionized scholarship and have continued to have a transformative influence on the understanding of the history of sex, gender, and sexuality into the twenty-first century. The most influential authors behind this work perceived the Renaissance to be more complex both in the quotidian aspects of daily life and also in extraordinary behaviors. In 1978, the first volume of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* occasioned both excitement and consternation among historians of sex. Foucault, a philosopher and leading post-structuralist scholar, wrote extensively on social construction and social control in European society, including studies of prisons, madness, and surveillance. These perspectives informed his reflections about the construction and control of sexuality in the European past. Indeed, Foucault's intervention challenged scholars to reexamine their approaches to sex and sexuality. Another major contribution to the recalibrating of historical studies of sex, gender, and sexuality was John Boswell's *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (1980). Boswell demonstrated that in the premodern world there were men who engaged in homosocial and/or homosexual relationships, although traditional history had obscured them behind the ecclesiastical rhetoric of homophobia. Boswell argued that there were gay men throughout premodern Europe but his methodology and conclusions were criticized as essentialist and lacking the appropriate consideration of context and cultural influences such as Foucault had urged. Nevertheless, despite criticisms

about essentialism, Boswell did uncover homosexual (sodomitical) and homoaffective men across society, integrated into both clerical and secular societies. In this way, Boswell forged a path for scholars to search for and analyze multiple sexualities that had been overlooked by traditional history or were obscured by the absence of explicit evidence.

One of the most telling criticisms levelled at both Foucault and Boswell was their neglect of gender as a category of historical analysis. Arguably, men and women experience the world differently according to how society evaluates and constructs women. This applies equally in the realm of sex and sexuality, which is neither natural nor essential. Foucault paid scarce attention to women's alternative experience of social construction and surveillance of sex and sexuality. Similarly, while lauded for opening the past for research on homosexuality, Boswell was criticized for eliding lesbians and other non-normative women under the category "gay," thus perpetuating their invisibility. A more refined and incisive analytical framework emerged out of these debates. What began as women's history in the 1970s, with the goal of recuperating women in the past, transformed into the critical lens of feminist studies, which analyzed the institutions and structures that restricted or shaped their lives, or contributed to their invisibility in historical scholarship. The other significant theoretical contribution to the new study of sex, gender, and sexuality falls under the rubric of cultural studies. This is a multifaceted approach emerging from literary studies, postmodernism, discourse analysis, and other theoretical perspectives that provided scholars with new linguistic and analytical tools. This versatile and complex perspective also encouraged explicitly interdisciplinary research which suits the intricate nature of sex, gender, and sexuality. As a result, there is a richer sense of the possibilities that were available for the lived reality of sex, gender, and sexuality and an expanded ability to study and evaluate the values, beliefs, and experiences of people in the past.

These innovations emerged at a time when the traditional Burckhardtian narratives were being widely criticized by political, social, and intellectual historians, and by the mid-1980s new scholarship was appearing that brought new insights to sex and gender in the Italian Renaissance. They applied methodologies that bridged differences in social and economic status, sex, sexuality, and gender, geography, and religion. While the traditional sources of high culture—art and literature in particular—continued to provide a valuable foundation for understanding the rich cultural life and artefacts of the Renaissance, new analytical approaches yielded new insights. Diverse sources of evidence—court records, letters, chronicles, and Inquisitorial documents, among others—provided access to new populations including servants and prostitutes and the inhabitants of the streets and taverns of myriad Italian towns and cities. These new critical studies were a prelude to the research that would appear in the next two decades.

Guido Ruggiero's *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (1985) early on demonstrated how new methodologies and new sources were able to reveal hitherto unexplored worlds of Renaissance sex, gender, and

sexuality. Ruggiero examines the wide variety of sex crimes that were committed in Venice and he analyzes the various courts and disciplinary councils which enforced the laws, including those pertaining to sexual transgressions. The records reveal an intricate and contradictory approach to regulating sexuality that extended from conventional acts such as adultery and fornication to more egregious behaviors including rape and sodomy. Ruggiero's essays meet the challenges and opportunities posed by Foucault and Boswell, by feminist history and gender studies. His interdisciplinary reading of the evidence, ranging from the many cases discussed by the criminal courts, along with careful analysis of individual testimony, widened the scope of enquiry. Ruggiero's discussion reveals the rich detail about individuals, as they negotiated the social norms of sexuality and gender. He brings readers to an understanding of the social context and how individuals were integrated into their local communities and that of wider Venetian society.

The movement towards more sophisticated, nuanced, and focused considerations is also reflected in *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence* (1996) by Michael Rocke. In many ways, Rocke took on the challenge presented by John Boswell to identify men who had sex with men in their social contexts. Rather than othering them or pulling these men out of their community, Rocke engages with homosexuality as an integral part of Florentine society and culture. He examines seventy years of documentation from the "Office of the Night," which was established to oversee denunciations of homosexual (sodomitical) activity. This allowed Rocke to trace the nature of relationships between men, how they were treated by society, how and why they were denounced to the court, and the penalties levied. His scholarship reveals that, despite the harsh evaluation of sodomy in ecclesiastical law and in various secular jurisdictions, Florence displayed remarkable tolerance. Where Boswell's research had scanned 1000 years of European history, seeking to identify men who were possibly homosexual, Rocke analyzes deep and focused sources to identify a specific group of men, applying sophisticated theoretical and methodological tools to reveal new understandings of non-normative sexuality in the Italian Renaissance.

Judith Brown's *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy* (1986) similarly contributed to the new approaches to sexuality and identity. She focused on non-normative sexuality, although in a unique context. Here the background is not the streets, homes, and markets of the large, cosmopolitan cities of Renaissance Italy. Rather, Brown's subjects lived within the walls of a convent, separated from the worldly temptations of secular life. Yet, even in a community of women vowed to chastity, Brown finds convoluted self-identities and a sexual relationship between two women that was transgressive and multi-valent. The case of the "lesbian nun" Benedetta Carlini was instantly controversial. Could two nuns possibly have a conscious lesbian sexual identity, given the social norms and religious context in which they lived? This is the same criticism that greeted John Boswell's assertions about "gay" men in premodern Europe.

There was widespread agreement that categories such as gay or lesbian were products of late twentieth-century Western society and to impose them back in time was anachronistic and misleading. Moreover, in this case, the individuals evoked far more questions than those of sexual identity or sexual activity, with a relationship complicated by angelic possession and mystical visions. The debate surrounding Carlini's activities and identities continues, as Patricia Simon's essay in this collection demonstrates. Yet one of the most enduring contributions of Brown's study, for the history of sexuality and gender, is her ability to cross 600 years and engage intimately with individuals of the past. This is a history of two nuns, in an out-of-the-way convent, who experienced rich and problematic inner lives, beyond what might be expected. Whether the women can be categorized as "lesbians" does not dispel the impact of recuperating lost women and a lost past, the meaning and implications of which continue to attract scholarly analysis.

The profound transformation that occurred between 1978 and 1996 in the study of sex, gender, and sexuality in premodern Europe began with the recognition of new topics and moved to a more rigorous application of the intervening theoretical and methodological insights of Foucault and Boswell, of feminism and cultural studies. If the former approach is exemplified by essays collected in *Human Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (1978), the latter is evident in the essays in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West* (edited by Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler, 1996). This volume stresses that human behavior manifests both continuities and transitions that can be independently evaluated and separated from arbitrary and obsolete periodization. Many essays integrate traditional periods moving seamlessly into a premodern world. Some essays rely on traditional Renaissance evidence but deploy law, art, and literature to examine new research questions. Rona Goffen examines Titian's frescoes to explore misogyny. Other authors address innovative, even bold or cheeky themes. Feminism and critical theory are deployed throughout the collection. The usefulness of interdisciplinarity to reveal new aspects of society and cultural experience is equally evident. Dyan Elliott's reexamination of the reciprocity of the conjugal debt, the notion that a husband and wife have equal call on their spouse for sexual access jostles the foundations of premodern marriage. Rather than accepting the idea that a married couple's sex life was balanced and equitable, Elliott concludes that wives were subordinate even in bed and had no right to refuse sexual intercourse. Ivana Elbl examines the doubly transgressive sexual liaisons among Portuguese sailors to Africa. Sailors, who were often already married with families in Europe, frequently formed enduring relationships with African "wives," transgressing both Christian monogamy and establishing irregular relationships with non-Christian women. Significantly, in Africa these unions were ignored or tolerated by Portuguese leaders, ecclesiastical as much as secular. More theoretically adventuresome is Nancy Partner's exploration of the psychological dimensions of sexuality. She applies contemporary psychological theory, in particular Freud, to assess the sexual dimensions

of mystics and their ecstatic visions. Even the realm of masturbatory pornography is probed through Andrew Taylor's critical reading of marginalia and other physical marks and stains on manuscript pages which could reflect the sexual responses of readers to the texts.

The essays in *Desire and Discipline* reveal the richness, diversity, and intellectually invigorating research that in just two decades had made the new field of sex, gender, and sexuality one of the most exciting areas in Renaissance studies. While reflecting new research areas, the roots of which can be found in the theoretical and methodological innovations in the late twentieth century, the essays in *Desire and Discipline* build upon traditional topics and themes and frequently employ conventional Renaissance sources, to stimulate a metamorphosis of old research perspectives into new and innovative ones. Thus, the ideal courtier has become a man subject to gender-based analysis while the lens of feminist analysis reveals the court lady to be not so much an equal but rather a pale, subordinate shadow to the courtier. Similarly, freed from her artificial manners and learning, the courtesan is revealed as a masculine fiction sanitized from the precarious and harsh life of Renaissance prostitutes.

The last quarter of the twentieth century, then, was a watershed for the historiography of sex, gender, and sexuality. Pioneering scholarship foreshadowed issues that would preoccupy later scholars and set the trajectory for subsequent research. This scaffolding of new research questions, theories, and methodologies has resulted in creative approaches that are rapidly transforming the field.

While monographs have been, and continue to be, written about sex, gender, and sexuality in the Renaissance, it seems that these topics, at this point in the evolution of scholarship, lend themselves more readily to the genres of essays or journal articles. The essay form allows scholars to analyze focused bodies of evidence and arrive at conclusions that are precise and demonstrable. Presumably, at some point these focused studies will coalesce into broader discussions leading to more generalized conclusions. For the moment, however, the essay collection remains the most significant means for the dissemination of research.

Two essay collections in particular demonstrate the very promising new approaches to research into sex, gender, and sexuality in the twenty-first century. In *A Cultural History of the Human Body in the Renaissance* (2010), Katherine Crawford provides a chapter that offers redirection from the perspectives of Foucault. She points back to the important role of classical literature, mediated by Christian values, in the formation of beliefs about sexuality and marriage, and classical medical literature which defined the sexed body. In *A Cultural History of Sexuality* edited by Bette Talvacchia (2011), nine essays address a wide variety of questions about Renaissance sexuality as they emerge from diverse sources. Essays focus on the troubled categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality, and sex with respect to religion, medicine, popular beliefs, prostitution, and erotica. Collectively, this collection opens wide the possibilities in the study of sex, gender, and sexuality.

In order best to demonstrate how recent work has reshaped and advanced the field of sex, gender, and sexuality in Renaissance Italy, we have organized the essays of this collection into three sections. The first, “Sex, Order, and Disorder,” deals primarily with issues relating to legal and political themes, and particularly with efforts by authorities both political and ecclesiastical to channel or control sexuality. The second section, “Sense and Sensuality in Sex and Gender,” highlights recent work that has taken some of the turns that are rewriting historical narratives generally, above all histories of the senses, of the emotions, and of food. The third section, “Visualizing Sexuality in Word and Image,” considers how we work with early modern fluidity around identities and boundaries, and whether we might now be more restrictive than they were in categories that we bring to our analysis.

Sex, Order, and Disorder

One of the most obvious sites of sex and disorder in Renaissance Italy surely lies with the buying and selling of women’s bodies. Burckhardt’s perspective that courtesans were elegant, intellectual companions, surviving more on sexual titillation than selling their bodies, has endured, despite the influence of feminist research. In particular, Veronica Franco was seen as an elegant, ideal, and appropriate companion for Renaissance princes.¹ Much research on courtesans has focused on Franco and her courtesan sisters. It highlights the courtesan’s learning, ability to write poetry and sing pleasing songs, and, most importantly, to entertain men while avoiding becoming common sexual property and losing their allure and their living. Tessa Storey adheres to the older view, assessing the social status of courtesans, suggesting that they were linked to “elite manhood and male honor,” idealizing the relationships between clients and courtesans who were certain that proximity to powerful men would protect them.²

However, the other side of courtesan life was a precarious one of dependence and fear of falling into common prostitution. Social and criminal vulnerability highlights the lives of all prostitutes, include high status courtesans. Even Veronica Franco was called before the courts to account for her behavior. More vulnerable courtesans and prostitutes lived precariously, prey to men of all sorts, accosted in the streets, and struggling to support themselves and maintain their dignity. The records of their appearances before the courts reveals they often managed without protectors or financial security.³ Early on Elizabeth Cohen examined the rough and ready life of prostitutes on the streets of Rome, revealing a form of sociability and social integration.⁴ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo brings an innovative approach to the role and experience of urban prostitutes. She examines urban planning in Ferrara, revealing the city’s ongoing attempts over decades to maintain prostitutes in the same locales.⁵ Focusing on the economics of prostitution in Venice, Paula Clarke finds that regulation of prostitution became less rigorous over time, with women experiencing more freedom and the concomitant growth of the sex trade.⁶

Guido Ruggiero opens the section “Sex, Order, and Disorder” in this collection with a broader approach to order and disorder in sexuality. He offers a rereading of Boccaccio’s often-studied story from the *Decameron* of Griselda, a woman who patiently endures the series of humiliations that her husband Gualtieri devises in order to test her faithfulness. The critics and creative artists who have puzzled over the tale and its meaning for centuries have focused mainly on Griselda and on issues of class and gender. Ruggiero moves a step further to ask how those who heard it in the fourteenth century might have received it as a political message. Gualtieri is not only a cruel husband. His willingness to be cruel and unjust to his spouse Griselda highlights the dangers that all may encounter when societies fall under the control of rulers who are narcissistic, vain, and insecure. Florentines could look around to other cities where lords treated citizens as Gualtieri treated Griselda; sexual and political violence were interchangeable and marriages were contracted for money rather than love. There was no reason to suppose that Florence would be exempted from that kind of cruelty and exploitation. The Griselda story offered the lessons of a Mirror for Princes, but it was also a Mirror for Merchants, warning them of what would happen when love did not animate their closest personal relationships.

What Boccaccio warned the Florentines about in the fourteenth century was precisely what the Sieneese were experiencing in the sixteenth. Elena Brizio observes that sexual violence remained common across Italy. Men used it as a tool to control girls, boys, married women, and widows. In the context of the wars of the 1550s, when Florence annexed Siena, its political “use” expanded greatly. Sexual violence was a means of imposing or confirming power over subordinates, and men across the political, ecclesiastical, mercantile, and professional spheres considered sexual violence a legitimate mode of operating in their social sphere, and so exercised it freely. In contrast to what Boccaccio described, the absolute ruler who came to dominate mid-sixteenth-century Siena positioned himself on the opposite side of the dynamic. Duke Cosimo I de’ Medici proclaimed strict punishments for sexual violence against both men and women in a law of 1558, threatening either death or galley servitude for those convicted. Brizio describes this setting and moves from metaphor to practice as she reviews archival sources, judicial records, and public reports to see how sexual violence was perceived before and after the law issued in 1558. Duke Cosimo I was dealing with more than just a different political milieu, and Brizio also explores whether the changes in the normative codes brought about by the Council of Trent had an impact on social attitudes to sexual violence in Siena and its locale.

Normative codes were becoming more explicit and restrictive across Italy in the sixteenth century, but did they have much actual effect? Like Cohen, Ghirardo, and Clarke, Vanessa McCarthy and Nicholas Terpstra document and analyze the sex trade in a particular city. Their focus is on working-poor prostitutes’ residential patterns in early modern Bologna, and they find that on the whole these women were integrated into, rather than pushed to the margins of, their local neighborhoods and the wider city. Bologna’s activist and ambitious

archbishop Gabriele Paleotti was rebuffed when he attempted to impose Tridentine norms for public sexuality. The Bolognese instead approached regulation as a matter of market rather than morals, allowing those prostitutes registered with a civic magistracy to practice prostitution almost anywhere within the city walls. While about half of the 300–400 women registered clustered in specific, unofficial red-light neighborhoods, the other half lived on streets with only one or two other registered prostitutes, where their neighbors were more often working-poor men and women. In spite of the strict normative codes that continued to be preached and publicly posted by ecclesiastical authorities, prostitutes were seldom actually shunned or marginalized because of their sex work. They were more often incorporated into the working-poor neighborhoods and the larger social fabric of early modern Bologna.

These tensions between norms and practice certainly intensified as Tridentine rules became more specific, and as ecclesiastical and public regimes worked to determine whether and how to implement them. In Rome, these authorities came together in particularly complicated ways. Elizabeth Cohen explores how they attempted to address and adjudicate the various forms of sexual impropriety that their normative codes were describing in ever more precise detail. Sexual misconduct came under the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts, but the records of these courts do not survive in Rome. Criminal court records do survive, however, and since these took charge of some sex offenses we can see how people responded to the new rules. Cohen looks in particular at cases of adultery, which was often defined by the married status of the woman and which, like sodomy, could actually cover a broader range of actions than might be grouped today under the term. Reviewing some trials of real or imagined adulterous relationships, Cohen finds that it is impossible to determine how effective the “reforms” actually were. There was simply more driving these relationships forward than any narrow definition allows: romance, exploitation, assault, and sheer comedy all shape the court testimonies, and show that the parties in many so-called adulterous relationships were thinking less often of sex—or the pope—than authorities thought.

Sense and Sensuality in Sex and Gender

The possibilities for research on sense and sensuality in the Italian Renaissance are myriad. The richness and abundance of voices, producing or employing sensual outcomes, and the voices of desire and of sex and of pleasure combine into a garden of delights. Here again, recent essay collections prove particularly valuable for the variety of forms, voices, and experiences that they are able to convey. In *The Erotic Cultures of Renaissance Italy* (2010) Sara Matthews-Grieco gathers eight essays that reflect upon the various ways in which visions of sensuality could circulate, including on painted furniture, decorated bedroom ceilings, or musical instruments, erotic language, or pornographic engravings. So, too, cultural practices are explored such as sensuality within marriage, music in domestic

contexts, and sexual innuendos in writing or in doodles in a book. This collection, then, reveals how creative Renaissance people could be in demonstrating desire and articulating their sensual pleasures.

Sexual orientation and sexual desire have also come under scrutiny. A significant collection of essays edited by Melanie L. Marshall, Linda L. Carroll, and Katherine A. McIver, *Sexualities, Textualities, Art and Music in Early Modern Italy* (2014), brings together nine essays that explore sexual desire and sexual orientation through multilayered and intersecting interpretations of art, music, and texts. The result is an intriguing collection of scholarship that maximizes opportunities for interdisciplinary, collaborative research across the disciplines, as an outgrowth of work on critical theory and intertextuality. In a more literary context, marriage orations have revealed some writers not only praised marriage in conventional terms for political ends, social expediency, and the delights of family. Alongside extolling the pleasures of the marriage bed for a husband, some extend that vision of sensuality and sexual pleasure to the wife as well, challenging conventional notions that only prostitutes took pleasure in sex, and not respectable matrons.⁷

The sensual possibilities of homosexual activities, especially related to male prostitution, were part of Michael Rocke's study *Forbidden Friendships*. He argues that male prostitution was harshly condemned, especially anal penetration, as something no adult man should permit. Nevertheless, an examination of some contemporary writers reveals an appreciation of homosexual sensuality along with defenses of sodomy and male prostitution which harkened back to the superior evaluation of homosexuality in classical literature.⁸ The role of pedagogical pederasty and its celebration within Renaissance mentoring systems has equally been explored in literary sources by Ian Moulton who demonstrates the currency of such studies to both a popular and educated audience.⁹

These studies show that while male sexuality has been visualized, both in the Renaissance, and by scholars of the Renaissance, as virile and active, it was also vulnerable and contingent. For example, castration was always a possibility in war, for medical reasons, as a consequence of vendetta, or for social or aesthetic reasons.¹⁰ Impotence also was part of male sexuality, with extensive social, economic, and political ramifications. Some of these issues are explored in Sara F. Matthews-Grieco's edited volume *Cuckoldry, Impotence and Adultery in Europe (15th–17th century)* (2014). Impotence could be implicated in social unrest among urban dwellers or occasion political turmoil among the elites. It could be physiological, subject to medical intervention, or magical leading towards the Inquisition and the Renaissance's fear of witchcraft. Six essays focus on various aspects of the social, cultural, political, medicinal, and literary discussions of impotence in Italian courts and cities, together providing an integrated and provocative view of male sexuality and sensuality.

The essays in this collection's second section, "Sense and Sensuality in Sex and Gender," traverse back and forth between literature and the lives of men and women. Our literary accounts span what was formerly cast as the division of

high and low, including both Castiglione's serious prescriptions on when a sleeve is more than just a sleeve, and also some more comic accounts by lesser-known poets of when a sausage is more than a sausage. We pair these with two micro-historical accounts of sexual pairings, one grown notorious in recent decades by the controversies that erupted when it was first published, and the other more obscurely quotidian. We aim in bringing them together to revisit what scholars may bring to such accounts, and how that shapes our readings in ways we may want now to rethink.

In the first of these microhistorical studies, Patricia Simons re-examines the case of Benedetta Carlini, the early seventeenth-century nun and abbess described above and made famous in Judith Brown's *Immodest Acts* (1986). When Brown identified Carlini as a lesbian, on the basis of documents that showed her as having regular orgasmic sex with a younger nun under her supervision, her work stirred controversy. Historians like Rudolph Bell firmly rejected the description of Carlini as "lesbian" on the basis that sexual activities did not imply sexual identities. Simons takes the discussion a step further, arguing that the question of identity is less important now than one related to sense and emotion. Did they—and should we—see their sex as mainly physical? Or were there registers of erotic mysticism that would have led both Benedetta and Mea to frame their contact together as expressions of a spiritual relationship? While some of their contemporaries, like some of ours, may see their religious language as pretext, what happens when we take it seriously and take them sincerely? As the example of their congregation's patron saint St. Catherine of Siena showed, medieval mysticism provided enough of a language and model for the erotic potential of religious imagery.

Thomas V. Cohen then explores another example of when we need to ask whether a transgression is always a transgression, by looking at the case of Ludovico Santa Croce, and the gang he gathered around him to prowl the streets of Rome. The life lived well needed witnesses for validation, and Ludovico's ego amplified his other drives as he led a group of young *conversi* to visit the statuesque courtesan Betta la Magra. They shared food, drink, and more, and Ludovico's boundary crossing brought him to court. But what *were* his transgressions? Was it just proper and improper sexual practices, was it individual intimacy moving to group sex, was it about commoners and nobles, or about Christians and those who, despite having been "made Christian" were still considered in some way *ebrei*? If transgression lies in the eyes or voices of the witness, we have here a complicated intersection of identities and codes, values and practices. The questions here, as in Benedetta Carlini's convent, lie with what those in the bed and those around it thought about norms and deviances.

Gerry Milligan brings us to what many consider the *uber* code of the early modern male, Baldassare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, the canonical text that we noted at the beginning of this essay. Milligan looks in particular at the relation Castiglione draws between clothing and masculinity. Clothing was fundamental to Renaissance discourses of gender and sexuality. While it was

common to read that what men wore was critical to discussions of violence, military preparedness, and virtue, it's not at all clear just *how* clothing was supposed to do what it did. Was it cause or effect, or sign and symbol of masculinity or effeminacy? Castiglione saw clothing choice as potentially one of life or death, and that not just for reputation alone. As Italy suffered through the invasions of French, Spanish, and Germans, it was common, albeit perhaps too easy, to correlate a soldier's effectiveness to what he had worn. As Milligan asks, might a focus on clothing show us how aesthetics and militarism functioned in Renaissance projects of social control?

Laura Giannetti then takes us from dead seriousness to dietary satire with approaches to a question that Freud might well have faced: is it ever the case that a sausage is just a sausage? Italians valued word play as much as sexual play, and found the convergence of the two absolutely compelling. *Carne* was meat, flesh, and inevitably the male organ, and while mendicant preachers may have condemned all of them together, most Italians appreciated them individually for each of their meanings. Religious authorities never managed to expand the imaginative forms of their dismay at the gluttony and carnality that sausages represented; the most they could do was draw on Galen's counsel of moderation to reinforce their message of self-denial. Yet Giannetti shows that authors and artists who were more aesthetically than ascetically driven began to explore the imaginative potential of sausages as symbols of vitality, fertility, and prowess. Their poems and stories disseminated messages of a humble meat that grew into a powerful cultural symbol.

Visualizing sexuality in word and image

As early as 1978, Thomas G. Benedek's article "Beliefs about Human Sexual Function" examined ideas about the sexed body, noting in particular the persistence of the one-sex theory that women and men had parallel sex organs, with the male organs externalized and female organs internalized. Moreover, the balance of the humors—hot, cold, moist, dry—also impacted the nature of any individual's sexual makeup. Thomas Laqueur, like previous scholars, based much of his argument on medical texts. It was not only the words, but also the images that seemed to portray inverted genitals. Laqueur's analysis went further, however, to the conclusion that the one-sex body and the humors meant that both women and men needed to ejaculate semen for conception to occur.¹¹ Laqueur's suggestion that Renaissance doctors and others believed in the two-seed theory was controversial and stimulated a great deal of scholarship on both science and medicine and gender and the body.

Interest in the sexed body and the physicality of sex and sexuality has continued to expand, embedding medical perspectives of the sexed body into a cultural context. In her study *The Sex of Men* (2011), Patricia Simons extended the critical study of men's history to focus on the physiological construction of men. Her analysis is based upon exhaustive, interdisciplinary research including

theoretical, textual, and visual evidence. Simons re-focuses attention on the centrality of semen to masculinity and fertility, thus rebalancing the dominant phallocentric evaluation of premodern gender.

Sexual acts and sexual pleasure have embraced topics and methodologies that would have been unthinkable by earlier scholars. The collection *Sex Acts in Early Modern Italy* (2010), edited by Allison Levy, includes an amazing array of topics that illuminate sexual activities in new detail. Renaissance images and objects portray an imaginative array of sexual positions in sources, both textual and physical, ranging from Aretino's writing on sexual positions to their portrayal on medicinal drug jars. Patricia Simons pushes the cultural history of sex and sexuality further in her essay about the dildo. An analysis of the physical objects is set against descriptions of their imagined use. Renaissance books were sufficiently explicit, however, that the need for visualization was unnecessary.

In *Machiavelli in Love* (2007), Guido Ruggiero challenges some of the fundamental ideas about the history of sex and sexuality proposed by Foucault and which have subsequently dominated research. Rejecting Foucault's assertion that sex and sexual identity were modern inventions, Ruggiero demonstrates that in fact there was Renaissance sex and Renaissance sexual identity, dismissing earlier theoretical obstructions. Using a combination of court documents and imaginative literature, he highlights the complexities of mind, body, and desire, and the formation of masculine identity. In many ways, this book moves the historical study of premodern sexuality onto a new and more sophisticated plane, one that reveals individuals in their uniqueness.

In *The Manly Masquerade* (2003), Valeria Finucci presented one of the earliest analyses of Renaissance men as an inflected category deploying not only feminist theory but also psychoanalytic theory to understand the constructions of masculinity from both a psychological and cultural perspective. One of the most violent and sexually problematic figures of Renaissance Italy was the brilliant goldsmith/artist Benvenuto Cellini. Margaret Gallucci presents a new twist to traditional biography by integrating a multidisciplinary analysis of Cellini, his artistic brilliance, his penchant for violence and disorderliness, and his transgressive homosexuality that was sufficiently public to result in criminal proceedings and house arrest. Following new literary criticism and sexuality and gender studies, Gallucci tries to move beyond simplistic evaluations of homosexuality and misogyny to make sense of Cellini's complex artistic life and disorderly behaviors.¹²

The third section of this collection, "Visualizing Sexuality in Word and Image," takes up these questions of sex acts, the body, and identity by focusing on four cases of creative artists who employ sexuality and gender in ways that challenge social norms and expectations, and that raise questions both then and now about identity and voice. James M. Saslow returns to the questions around sexual acts and sexual identities that emerged in disputes around the "lesbian" nun Benedetta Carlini, and to which Castiglione's sartorial strictures allude. He argues that the case of Italian painter Gianantonio Bazzi (1477–1549) contributes

to the larger ongoing controversy in queer studies over whether we can locate an embryonic homosexual self-consciousness in Renaissance culture. Bazzi's fondness for young men gave him the nickname "Il Sodoma" and he never shied away from making this a central part of a very public persona. We have little documentary evidence for his private feelings, yet his art embodied and transmitted homosexual desires, and it is clear from the series of commissions that he attracted an audience which read and sympathized with those clues. Saslow reviews Sodoma's artworks, patrons, and reputation over a few centuries and reflects on what the larger stakes are both methodologically and ideologically as we weigh whether these do indeed provide sufficient evidence for a homosexual self-consciousness.

Sexual agency and identity are complex enough when we are aiming to interpret what an individual says in a court room or inquisitorial investigation, or conveys in a painting or poem. What do we do when men pretend to adopt the voice of women and project desire, intent, and agency? Ian Frederick Moulton compares two such works, Pietro Aretino's *Ragionamenti* and Alessandro Piccolomini's *La Raffaella*, both of them written in the 1530s, and both featuring an experienced woman mentoring a younger woman on the finer points of sex and sexuality. In both, the older woman assures her younger companion that her desires are legitimate and should be acted on to the fullest, even when transgressive. In both these desires are essentially projections of male fantasies. Moulton explores what we learn from male projections of female speech, identity, agency, and particularly how male visualization and ventriloquizing exposes larger issues around the place of women and the articulation of sex and gender in early modern society.

While we often emphasize the transformative effects of printing, early modern culture continued to value the oral and visual, and it brought these together in the art of memory. Sergius Koderá reaches back to classical texts that recommended erotic images as particularly memorable, and to the early modern author Giovan Battista della Porta's *L'arte del ricordare* (1566) which specifically advised stories of sex between humans and animals as *aides memoires*. Myths of Leda, Europe, Ganymede, and others were all drawn into this work, though more overtly in the vernacular than the Latin version. Koderá follows this visualization of intercourse between humans and animals beyond the arts of memory and on to texts on cross-breeding and to the paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and Titian, seeing all of these as examples of a distinctively early modern embrace of variety, engagement, and hybridity in sexuality.

In the final essay, Jane Tylus traces how Torquato Tasso depicted women in both the *Gerusalemme liberata* (1581) and the *Gerusalemme conquistata* (1593). While he felt that his powers as an epic poet were expanding, the later work reduces the role and influence of female characters. The shift underscores how the *Liberata* was more radical in its conception and execution. As he aimed to style himself more self-consciously as an epic poet in the classical tradition, Tasso moved from Virgil to Homer as his model, a move at once stylistic and also in

some sense moralistic – he saw this as an answer to criticism of his language and of what he called the “fallacious artistries” that had marked the earlier poem. Gender become critical to his conception of what is true in art, though with ambivalent results – the woman who intervened with power was superseded by the woman who intervened with tears.

These essays explore themes that were only emerging two decades ago. Their authors’ commitment to taking both an interdisciplinary and intersectional approach allows re-evaluation of interpretations which were in danger of becoming too rigid and which may have imposed too much on what the voices in stories, trials, letters, and images were aiming to express. Contradiction, ambivalence, and ambiguity abound. Recent work in all three areas that we have singled out has explored just how widely the gaps between prescription and reality yawn in the period, in part because of ambivalence on the part of those promoting normative regimes. Yet gaps more often emerged because these regimes aimed too far beyond what people expected and were willing to live with in their neighborhoods, their relationships, and expectations.

As we move forward undoubtedly there will be new insights gleaned about the lives and loves of Renaissance people. The intellectual and evidential foundation outlined here in letters, court records, poems, pamphlets, and artworks will continue to support a rich and diverse research culture. And there are new questions on the horizon. The literary, philosophical, artistic, and existential implications of transgender are only in a nascent stage of investigation, despite the initial and hesitant foray made in *Human Sexuality*. Some topics and themes will percolate until new sources and new perspectives allow new insights and conclusions. As the study of sex, gender, and sexuality moves forward, the dialogue between past and present will continue, animated by sharp disagreements, punctuated by moments of clarity, and moving steadily towards a deeper understanding of lives lived in a period of creative foment. The voices gathered here, and the creative exchange they offer, advance that discourse on the lives of those who made the Renaissance a fascinating period of critical change.

Notes

- 1 Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*.
- 2 Storey, “Courtesan Culture.”
- 3 Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds in Renaissance Rome*.
- 4 Cohen, “Seen and Known.”
- 5 Ghirardo, “The Topography of Prostitution in Renaissance Ferrara.”
- 6 Clarke, “The Business of Prostitution in Early Renaissance Venice.”
- 7 D’Elia, “Marriage, Sexual Pleasure, and Learned Brides in the Wedding Orations of Fifteenth-Century Italy.”
- 8 Locke, “Whoorish boys.”
- 9 Moulton, “Homoeroticism in *La cazzaria* (1525).”
- 10 See Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade*.
- 11 Laqueur, *Making Sex*.
- 12 Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini*.

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PART I

Sex, Order, and Disorder



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2

THE LORD WHO REJECTED LOVE, OR THE GRISELDA STORY (X, 10) RECONSIDERED YET AGAIN

Guido Ruggiero

One of the last works that Francesco Petrarch wrote was a short story in Latin which he claimed to have translated from the Italian of the final tale of Boccaccio's *Decameron*—the novella of the patient Griselda, who accepted every cruel test her husband, Gualtieri, tried her with to assure her worthiness as a wife. In Petrarch's version Griselda was a humble peasant and Gualtieri the esteemed Marquis of Saluzzo, a prince loved by all for his wise rule. Tellingly, he claimed that he was translating the tale because it was so very useful as a lesson on how to treat a wife that it needed to be in Latin to gain the wider circulation that the universal language of learned men merited.

And, in fact, Boccaccio's original version has been long read in that light, almost as if Petrarch's Latin retelling determined its meaning for future generations. Recently, moreover, with more sophisticated discussions of gender, his perspective has garnered even greater purchase, with Boccaccio's tale being criticized for its misogynistic vision of matrimony and support for a husband's absolute power over a wife. In turn, this perspective has even colored the way some read the *Decameron* itself, discovering behind its laughing stories and powerful, clever women a conservative defense of traditional patriarchy. But in this essay, I want to suggest with a historian's eye that the story of Griselda's ideal wifely qualities and her husband's wisdom is in reality not there in the *Decameron* (X, 10).

For while that tale has been often read as an account of Griselda, and her virtually biblical acceptance of her husband's will, it may well have read at the time as a story much more about the many negative qualities of Gualtieri.¹ For he is presented throughout as a dangerous tyrant moved by a misguided sense of honor and a rejection of the emotion of love, which meant that he was incapable of being either a good husband or a good ruler from the perspective of fourteenth-century Florentine readers. Thus, this tale is not just concerned with love and marriage, but also crucially with rule and the rule of princes, in this case

negatively portrayed as tyrants. In a way, then, I want to argue that it is Boccaccio's "The Prince" a century and a half before Machiavelli.

Even the language of the day nicely sets up this theme: for the term *signore* (lord) had multiple meanings that could span the gamut of power relationships from the everyday husband as *signore*/lord over his wife and household, to the local *signore*/lord/noble with power over those below him, on to the *signore*/lord/ruler (either a prince or a tyrant depending on one's perspective), and, of course, finally on to the ultimate *signore*, the *Signore*/God. As we shall see, all these meanings are at play in Boccaccio's version of this tale.

The teller of this story of multiple *signori*, the irrepressible Dioneo, suggests its negative tone right from the start, immediately warning that he finds Gualtieri's behavior in general and towards his wife "beastly."² He states flatly, "I want to speak about a Marquis, not all that magnificent, but actually *an idiotic beast*. . . . In fact, I would not suggest that anyone follow his example. . . ."³ This, obviously, is hardly the wise prince Petrarch created in his supposed translation of the tale. Dioneo then more subtly attacks him as a ruler (*signore*), remarking that he was a young man who spent all his time "in hawking and hunting and in nothing else."⁴

Here we have echoes of an earlier tale in the *Decameron*, the third tale of day two, about spendthrift Florentine youths who threw away the riches left them by their aristocratic father by living the thoughtless life of young nobles hunting, hawking, and living like *signori*.⁵ Significantly, those Florentine youths, after they lost their inherited fortune, regained it by going to England and loaning money at interest to the apparently even more foolish *signori* there, the English nobility, like many Florentine bankers.⁶ Yet quickly they squandered their riches again, because, as the story stresses, they returned to living like *signori*, eschewing the *virtù* that made their Florentine merchant/banker contemporaries so successful.

What, one might well ask, was this *virtù* that had allowed them to remake their fortune and that repeatedly brings success to the denizens of Boccaccio's tales? At one level the answer is simple. For Boccaccio's contemporaries *virtù* was a term that identified the range of behaviors that allowed one to succeed and made one person superior to another. Simply put, it marked out the best. But the simplicity of that definition quickly dissolves before the fact that largely because it was such a telling term its meaning was highly contested and fluid, in fact changing considerably over time, place, and across social divides.

Speaking very broadly, in an earlier warrior society many saw *virtù* in aggression, direct action, often violent; and in physical strength, blood line, and blood itself, even as at the same time moralists and philosophers often saw it in more Christian behavior that rejected violence and aggression. In the cities of northern Italy in the fourteenth century this traditional vision of *virtù* was first expanded, then increasingly overshadowed by a vision more suited to the urban life of the day and newer merchant/banker elites. For many at the time, *virtù* required the control of passions—in contrast to an earlier vision that privileged their more

direct expression—and included a strong lean towards peaceful, mannered conduct that required reasonable, calculating (at times sliding into cunning) behavior that controlled the present and significantly the future as well.⁷ In sum, *virtù*, even as it was contested and changed over time, was a word of power that helped to define an urban male citizen and a truly good man.

In the end, however, these youths were saved from their un-*virtù*-ous behavior by a *virtù*-ous nephew, Alessandro, who first re-established their fortunes via once again astute money-lending, and then with his *virtù* won a bride who turned out to be the daughter of the king of England, effectively overcoming all their foolish misdeeds. From this perspective, it is clear that the *signore* Gualtieri, much like Alessandro's uncles, was not a *virtù*-ous or good prince, ruling as he should. Rather, by not attending to anything but his own youthful pleasures, he was acting in a way that Florentines would have easily associated with their fears about contemporary *signori*/tyrants; for such rulers were seen by them as ruling all too often merely to serve their own whims and selfish pleasures at the expense of their subjects.

And, in fact, proudly republican Florence had recently in 1342 experienced a brush with a *signore*/tyrant of its own, Walter of Brienne. He had been appointed to a one-year term as ruler of the city in the hope that he would be able to overcome an economic crisis caused by the failure of the major banking houses of the city. But, as was often the case, he quickly attempted to take power permanently as a *signore* and was just as quickly thrown out after only ten months of unpopular rule. Almost immediately afterwards, a popular government returned to power, and it remained wary of *signori* of any type.⁸ Significantly, however, most Anglo-phone critics have failed to note that the Italian for Walter is Gualtieri and thus that Florence had thrown out a tyrannical Gualtieri of their own just a decade before Boccaccio completed the *Decameron*.

Tellingly the negative behaviors often associated with contemporary tyrants are immediately linked to the tale's Gualtieri and his marriage by Dioneo, who notes that not only did he not pay attention to anything else but his own selfish pleasures, he "had no interest in either taking a wife or having children. . . ."⁹ This, then, had created problems with his subjects. As they, like all good subjects, wanted him to take on the responsibilities of a mature male and ruler by marrying; for marriage was seen at the time as perhaps the most important sign of reaching full maturity and taking on the sober responsibilities of an adult male.¹⁰ Moreover, with marriage, a prince began to produce the heirs that would secure an ordered passage of power at his death, something that for his subjects was crucial. With Gualtieri's rejection of this, in essence Dioneo had presented his readers with a questionable *signore*/lord/ruler who refused to give up his youthful and irresponsible ways to rule as an adult prince with *virtù*.¹¹

In the end, then, although he reluctantly gave in to his subjects' demands, he decided to do so by taking a bride without consulting with anyone. And once again this would have troubled contemporaries. Arranged marriages were the norm in fourteenth-century Florence and more widely and crucially they

were negotiated by parents or relatives to secure broader family goals or, in the case of rulers, meaningful alliances. The immature Gualtieri instead took his marriage personally in hand to secure his selfish desires with no concern for his family, his subjects, or even love.

Moreover, his lack of love in selecting his bride also evoked the negative presentation in *Decameron* stories of many unhappy marriages where the lack of love had led to bad matches, especially for women. Repeatedly the tales advocated avoiding this ill-fated situation by marrying for true love, exactly what Gualtieri rejected. From his perspective marrying for love and loving his wife would have endangered his un-*virtù*-ous life, focused on his own personal pleasures. And at the same time, it would have also signaled the end of his freedom from his responsibilities as a ruler and declare that he had acquiesced in becoming the *signore*/prince that his subjects desired and that Petrarch had rewritten him as being in his misleading supposed Latin translation of the tale.¹²

Making his disgruntlement clear, Gualtieri finally did knuckle under to his subjects' demands, but warned them that whoever he might chose, they must honor her as their lady or feel his anger.¹³ The reality behind that warning was soon dramatically revealed.¹⁴ For Gualtieri had for some time been observing a pretty, well-mannered peasant girl who lived nearby. Yet crucially what made her most attractive to Gualtieri was the fact that as a humble peasant he was confident that he could dominate her so that she did not interfere with his youthful lordly pleasures, the selfish key to his marital strategy again.¹⁵

Following Gualtieri's misplaced desires, we are drawn ever deeper into the dark morass of unhappy marriages in the *Decameron*. Having selected his bride without disclosing her identity to anyone and without her even being aware of it, he insisted that his subjects come with him to celebrate the matrimony. And so it was that one day they followed him to an unlikely nearby village where the peasant girl, Griselda, lived in poverty with her father. The scene is nicely set by the narrator of the tale Dioneo, as he describes how the richly attired relatives of Gualtieri and his most important subjects arrived on horseback before Griselda's humble hut. When she, dressed in rags, rushed onto the scene, anxious to see who their lord's new bride would be, to everyone's surprise Gualtieri called down to her by name to ask to speak with her father.

She replied modestly that he was inside and accompanied him in to the peasant hut to talk with her father, Giannucolo.¹⁶ Even her father's name reeked of Griselda's humble status, for Giannucolo is the diminutive for Giovanni. Using the diminutive for an adult male, and a *pater familias* at that, essentially denied him any status or honor. Gualtieri underlined the point when he did not waste any time with niceties on a person who, given that lack of status, did not warrant them from his perspective. Thus, he did not ask Griselda's father for her hand as simple politeness required; rather he announced that he had come to marry her. Then, continuing in his high-handed ways, he turned to her and demanded that if he took her for his wife, "will you always be committed to pleasing me and never do or say anything that would upset me."¹⁷ Once again the absence

of love in Gualtieri's approach to his future bride is stunning, especially for the tales of the *Decameron*; and moreover, his lack of regard for her father, and for her is deeply troubling.

Turning to Florentine history and traditions once more it seemed almost as if his way of treating Griselda and her father echoed what the citizens of Florence most disliked in the high-handed ways of local nobles/lords that they had rejected in the 1290s when they passed their revered Ordinances of Justice. These laws were ostensibly designed to punish local nobles and their ilk (labeled magnates) for just such high-handed behavior and mistreatment of common folk. And these Ordinances had become a symbolic keystone of Florentine republican government and its civic vision and would remain so across the Rinascimento.

In fact, one of the few times that the Ordinances were questioned was when they were cancelled almost immediately after Walter of Brienne, the other Gualtieri and would-be *Signore* of Florence, was driven out. After he was expelled in 1343, the Ordinances were momentarily cancelled by a short lived aristocratic government and then almost immediately reinstated by the popular government that replaced both Gualtieri and that unpopular aristocratic moment, as a strong reminder that the city would not allow signori of any type to mistreat Florentines. And although Gualtieri did not himself revoke the Ordinances, the black legends that grew up around his rule often made him responsible for their momentary elimination and an attack on popular republic government.¹⁸

All that this implies is underlined by the famous marriage scene that follows, for Gualtieri, with his demands met, takes Griselda by the hand and leads her from her home. There in front of the whole group of his elegantly dressed subjects to their surprise and dismay he ordered her stripped naked.¹⁹ He then had her re-dressed with the aristocratic clothing and the rich accoutrements that made up a noble's wardrobe and only then consented to marry her. As often noted, this dramatic scene in its undressing and re-dressing of his bride essentially symbolized and perhaps contributed to the rebirth that Gualtieri believed he was engineering, transforming Griselda from a humble peasant to a noble wife, using clothing as both a symbol and a tool. And indeed, the tale goes on to point out how quickly and successfully she impressed the gathering, appearing to take up easily the manner and bearing of a princess in her new noble clothing. That impression was confirmed in the days following, when, as Gualtieri's wife, she displayed to all impressive manners and wifely virtues. In sum, once re-dressed she was capable of being transformed from a humble peasant to a noble princess—the very stuff of fairy tales and popular fantasy.

But it is also the very stuff of Florentine beliefs at the time—the elite of the city had shifted from old noble families to a newer merchant/banker group who dominated Florence both economically and socially. Thus, a humble peasant who gained the opportunity and the dress to move at the highest social levels was an attractive conceit, demonstrating that anyone with *virtù* could behave as well as the old nobility. From that perspective Griselda had that delicious quality of fulfilling contemporary fantasies, even if many rich Florentines would have

been comforted perhaps by the fact that such a leap for someone of her status was highly unlikely.

Yet there is a way in which the dramatic stripping of Griselda—a theme that would have great popularity in the future in literature and art—has masked a deeper honor dynamic involved in this troubling marriage. In fact, the tale's Florentine audience would have been aware from the first that marriages were virtually always moments when issues of honor were central. That was why fathers usually played such a significant role in such affairs: they had, in theory at least, the mature judgment to evaluate the complex calculus of family honor involved in a marriage alliance between two families without letting youthful emotions interfere. Unfortunately, from this perspective the young, selfish, self-centered Gualtieri fell far short of this ideal, as the tale made abundantly clear.

Nonetheless, Gualtieri was aware of the honor dimensions of his marriage and was anxious to resolve them in his own high-handed way. Anticipating the resistance of his subjects to his marriage of a peasant and its implications for the honor of all involved—a marriage that he saw as serving his interests and not theirs—from the first he insisted that they accept his choice and “honor” it and him as their ruler. And, of course, as long as his misguided honor was a driving force replacing love in his approach to marrying Griselda, it crippled the relationship and his ability to be a good husband and suggested a similar situation vis-à-vis his subjects as a ruler where love for his subjects was also lacking.

Crucially in this way of seeing things, his behavior evoked strong echoes of other husbands and princes in the tales of the *Decameron* whose lives were destroyed by their misguided sense of honor. In turn, such behavior echoed Florentine fears about the dangers of a central/northern Italian world where it appeared—in many ways correctly—that the days of republics like theirs were a thing of the past. They were being rapidly replaced by the one-man rule of *signori* who claimed to be princes, but more often than not seemed to Florentines to be self-serving tyrants like Gualtieri, more concerned with their misguided honor and selfish pleasures than just rule.

Yet in the short term things seemed to be looking up for Gualtieri's honor and his marriage. Not only did Griselda win over his subjects, she soon became pregnant and produced a daughter. But not long after the happy birth, the flaws in his personality and his treatment of his wife began to reveal a deeper, darker truth. Almost as if he feared to succumb to the success of his marriage, he decided to test his wife to assure himself that she was ready to honor all his lordly wishes, no matter how cruel and tyrannical they might be.

Significantly, however, he defended these tests to Griselda as a concern for his honor, complaining that his subjects were murmuring about her lowly peasant origins and the similar baseness of her daughter. In fact, his claim was presented as false by Dioneo. Gualtieri's honor was never questioned by his subjects in this context; actually, they are portrayed as quite happy with his bride, even as they were surprised by her success as a lady. Griselda, however, accepted his false claims, and, as a result, unhappily understood the worries about his honor that

were supposedly tormenting Gualtieri. Thus, she replied obediently as a subject to such a lord must: "My lord (*Signor mio*), do with me what you will as whatever is best for your *honor or contentment* I will accept . . ." ²⁰ (1239). Once again one wonders how this would have played for Florentine republican readers, who saw in such one-man rule and unjust claims of honor the essence of tyranny—the greatest danger to their own republican values and way of life. And in the context of an unloving, unhappy marriage, we are faced with a man and a relationship definitely gone wrong and a poor wife whose suffering Florentines could feel. ²¹

Things quickly go from bad to worse. Evermore the tyrant, Gualtieri deceitfully uses his honor to excuse his most outrageous demands on his wife/subject. First, he has a servant take her daughter away. And making it clear that he is acting on the lord's orders, the servant implies that he has been instructed to kill the child. With great sadness Griselda hands over her baby. Although Gualtieri is impressed by her obedience and strength in the face of his horrible demand, nonetheless he allows her and his subjects to believe that the child has been killed, while he secretly sends it off to relatives in Bologna to be raised.

Continuing his testing of her, when she gives birth to a male child and heir, he once more claims the child's life, using again the excuse of fearing for his honor and his rule.

Woman, because you have made this male child, I cannot find any peace with my subjects as they complain insistently that a grandson of Giannucolo will after me become their Signore, so I have decided that if I do not want to be overthrown, I must do with him what I did to the other [child]. Moreover, given all this [I must sooner or later] leave you and take another wife. ²²

Dioneo, however, makes it clear to his listeners that once again this claim is false, noting that Gualtieri's subjects were not complaining about the boy's humble background or the loss of honor it implied. In fact, he points out that in the face of the apparent murder of both children, his subjects "strongly damned him and held him to be a cruel man, while having great compassion for Griselda." ²³ Hardly the response of those anxious to see an unsuitable heir or wife eliminated or those enthusiastic about their exemplary prince, as Petrarch misleadingly portrayed him. Still, as her lord and their tyrant, both she and they had no option but to bow down before his cruel will, yet another lesson about the dangerous honor of lords and their potential for heavy-handed tyranny that would not have been lost on republican Florence.

So, the second child joined the first in apparent death—while Griselda lived on sadly under the shadow of her husband's warning that eventually he would end the whole problem of her humble birth besmirching his honor and threatening his rule by putting her aside to take an honorable bride. And finally, after twelve years Gualtieri decided that his daughter had grown old enough to pass as his new bride; and it was time for the last tests of his wife. Thus, he acted on

his earlier promise, informing her that he was ready to dissolve their marriage in order to take a more suitable wife.

Claiming that he had secured a dispensation from the pope to put her aside, he gathered his subjects together to make the announcement that he was sending her back to her father and her humble life as a peasant. Evidently, he was not content to continue his cruel testing of his wife in private; rather his cruel deeds had to be displayed before his subjects. The power to rule and the honor it required were at play and perhaps also a desire to warn his subjects that he was their *signore* as well and capable of similar deeds to defend his honor and assert his control over them. But considering what fourteenth-century Florentines would have made of this new outrage is again suggestive; for almost certainly they would have seen in this a cruel lord acting as a tyrant, mistreating his most loyal subject in a way that no right-thinking republican Florentine would ever accept—in sum Gualtieri was the model anti-prince.

Gualtieri announced, then, before his troubled subjects and the abject Griselda, that he was renouncing her as his wife

because in the past my ancestors were great nobles and lords of these lands, where your ancestors were always laborers (*lavoratori*), I wish that you will no longer be my wife, but rather that you return to the house of Giannucolo . . . and I will take another wife that I have found that pleases me and is befitting [to my status].²⁴

In sum, his ancestors were nobles and rulers and Griselda's were humble laborers; therefore, their marriage was unsuitable and he was literally suffering the dishonor of being a lord badly married.

The term "*lavoratori*" used to describe her ancestors, while it could be used as a synonym for a peasant, may well have suggested something more troubling yet. The more normal terminology for Griselda's ancestors would have been *contadini* or *villani*,²⁵ but by contrasting his nobility with her status as descended from *lavoratori*, Gualtieri once again was asserting status claims that would have ruffled Florentine feathers. For the people of Florence, who had fought so hard across the thirteenth century to drive out high-handed nobles like Gualtieri, had done so in the name of protecting the laborers of the city from just such high-handed behavior. In fact, the Ordinances of Justice labeled such behavior as typical of the nobility. And the Ordinances were celebrated as wise legislation designed to discipline and punish the nobility and protect *lavoratori* from their high-handed ways. Once again, the recent attempt to eliminate the Ordinances in 1342 and the threat that posed to the laborers of the city would have added weight to the negative valence of Gualtieri's speech.²⁶

All this cruel testing of Griselda calls up echoes of another person often associated with her and this tale, who had also suffered greatly under his lord, the biblical Job. In fact, commentators have often pointed to the parallels between

Griselda's patient suffering at the hands of her *signore*/lord/husband and Job's suffering at the hands of his *Signore*/Lord/God as a reason for seeing her as an exemplary wife and loyal subject accepting her husband's rightful dominance, just as Petrarch later recreated her.²⁷ There is an immediate problem with this parallel, however, for Job's Lord did not actually deal out the setbacks that deeply wounded him. He merely withdrew his protection and left the door open for Satan to attempt to destroy Job's faith, ultimately without success.

From that perspective Gualtieri seems more to parallel Satan than God. Despite that often-overlooked theological nicety, however, the God (*Signore*) of the Old Testament who allowed the testing of Job might seem to vaguely parallel at a higher level her lord (*signore*), Gualtieri's, testing of Griselda. But tellingly in the Trinitarian view of time being preached aggressively in Florence when the *Decameron* was being written and as war loomed with the papacy, that Old Testament God and His troubling relationship with humanity following the original sin of Adam and Eve—often portrayed as dishonoring that *Signore*—was seen by many as no longer the order of the day.

Christ's love and his sacrificing of his honor to die as a common criminal to save humanity was seen as inaugurating a new order and dispensation, a view especially stressed by a powerful group of local preachers at the time. And the Godliness of that new age, Boccaccio's present, was totally alien to Gualtieri and totally alien to his relationship with his wife and his subjects—for crucially, he explicitly rejected love in favor of jealously protecting his honor, much like the vengeful Lord of the Old Testament and nothing like the God of Love of the New. In a work that over and over again stresses the importance of love, love in marriage and in the best relationships between men and women, Gualtieri becomes the cruel husband, the anti-prince, the tyrant par excellence, and a reflection of a relationship with the wrathful God of the Old Testament that no longer obtained. And, of course, this last tale of the *Decameron* is told by Dioneo—literally "*Dio Neo*," the "new god" of love—who makes it clear that he finds Gualtieri unsuitable as a husband, ruler, and most certainly as any kind of a lover.

But this was merely the prelude to his last cruel testing of poor Griselda. For Gualtieri then demanded that she return to prepare and oversee his wedding to his new bride. Once again Griselda accepted this command. But significantly Dioneo insists on making a critical clarification: Griselda accepted his cruel command not as a patient ex-wife or as a loyal subject, *but out of love for Gualtieri*. He explains that she accepted only because "she had not been able to put aside the love she felt for him."²⁸ Thus she returned to the palace as a servant, to prepare the new wedding for her beloved.

Dioneo relates a number of humiliating moments in the preparations and underlines once again their injustice by noting the deeply troubled reactions of Gualtieri's subjects to her abuse and their repeated calls for a more just treatment of her. The humiliation comes to a head when Gualtieri has his new bride brought to his palace for the wedding. Presenting her to Griselda, he cruelly

twists the knife of her humiliation in public again, asking her opinion of his new lady. She answered,

My lord . . . she seems to me very good and if she is as intelligent as she is beautiful, as I believe, I am certain that you ought to live with her as the most content *signore* in the world. But still I would pray that those wounds that you gave before to the earlier one [wife], you spare this one; because I doubt that she could resist them, for she has been raised with great gentleness, whereas the other was used to hardships from her childhood.²⁹

Yes, Griselda has suffered and finally even she has complained. Subtly, and without ever referring to herself by name, she has pointed out finally the unjust nature of his rule over her and by implication over his subjects. It would be satisfying to claim that Griselda's final faint demonstration of defiance caused Gualtieri to change his ways, but Dioneo has already informed us that Gualtieri was ready to act even before she spoke. Thus ignoring her comments, he declares:

Griselda it is time that you finally hear the fruit of your long patience and that those who have held me to be cruel and unjust and bestial learn that it was all according to plan, wishing to teach you how to be a wife and teach others how to pick and keep a wife and [finally] to guarantee my peace as long as we would live together.³⁰

In the end, then, even Gualtieri admits that his lordly ways have been cruel, unjust, and bestial, but he justifies them by claiming that he has taught Griselda how to be a good wife. And many commentators, following Petrarch, have taken this claim at face value, arguing that Gualtieri is the demanding but just hero of the tale and Griselda the ideal wife fashioned by his treatment of her.

Yet, in fact, as the story makes clear over and over again, his cruelty did not teach her anything. She came to him, as she has just pointed out, already accustomed to suffering and accepting the hardships that life brought her as a peasant. She was born into hardship and suffering and she adapted quickly to her lord and his mistreatment because of her own inherent peasant ability to suffer and lack of a sense of honor. Indeed, one would be hard put to find a place where the tale or Dioneo suggest that she learned anything from Gualtieri. And while the fourteenth-century Florentine readers of this tale were more usually urban dwellers than peasants and thus theoretically not as inured to hardship and suffering, they were proudly not nobles either, and it is hard to imagine them accepting from local nobles the treatment that Gualtieri dished out. Moreover, it is hard to imagine that they would have felt sympathy for Gualtieri's defense of his cruel ways, as they too would have been unlikely to feel any need for such lessons from nobles or *signori* to learn the patience necessary to survive as subjects (as they had recently demonstrated throwing out their own Gualtieri) or for that matter even to survive as wives.

Actually, it might seem strange that finally after retaking Griselda as his wife and explaining his whole plan to his subjects and her, the couple are portrayed by Dioneo as living happily ever after. But providing an explanation for that improbable happy ending is a startling and significant admission by Gualtieri: for, as unlikely as it might seem, all his cruel tests have led *him* finally to a crucial transformation—the decisive often overlooked climax of the tale. He has finally discovered the emotion of love and has fallen in love with his victim, Griselda. He confesses at the last: “I am your husband who loves you more than anything and believe me when I say that there is no man more content than I in his wife.”³¹

Crucially with that admission, and Griselda’s ongoing love that survived his every cruelty, no longer is their marriage simply an unhappy mismatch with a wife subject to her lord/husband defending his misguided honor and selfish noble pleasures. Rather, now it is exactly the kind of marriage that the *Decameron* advocates over and over again. With love as its emotional base, the happy ending that the story, and the *Decameron* itself, requires is possible and Gualtieri, his wife, and perhaps even his subjects can live happily ever after—not a divine comedy perhaps but a human one.³²

For in the end Griselda survived a cruel lord, and with her willingness to suffer and peasant patience, she, not he, for a moment at least became the true teacher, teaching a tyrant who rejected love to love and to become a true prince—in this she was perhaps more Christ-like than Job-like. Let me suggest that by contemporary Florentine standards or those of the imagined and real women listeners of Dioneo’s tale, Gualtieri’s mistreatment of his wife was anything but a model of an ideal marriage until everything changed with love at its conclusion, despite Petrarch’s claim to the contrary.

In the end, then, she was a victim, but in ways that many critics have had trouble seeing. First, of course, at the hands of her cruel lord/husband. But also at the hands of the would-be aristocrat and anti-republican Petrarch. For despite his claims about what he saw as an ideal of marriage, he also retold her tale in Latin to celebrate the honor of the often cruel *signori*—tyrants and lords—that he cultivated for patronage and support far from the republican Florence that claimed him at times with difficulty as an honored son. Still, in the end she and love won out, a fitting conclusion to the new god of love, Dioneo, and his tale, as well as to Boccaccio’s *Decameron*.

Notes

- 1 I have used for this tale and all citations from the *Decameron* the classic edition edited by Vittorio Branca: Boccaccio, *Decameron*. In this reading that looks more closely at the Marquis of Saluzzo, I am following the path breaking lead of Barolini in her article “The Marquis of Saluzzo.” But I emphasize more a Florentine perspective on the tale than Barolini and am less inclined to follow her strategy of using game theory to explain what she labels as the Marquis’ *beffa*. I discovered after I wrote an early draft of this essay Barsella’s excellent article “Tyranny and Obedience.” My account stresses more the marital as well as the political side of the tale and looks more closely at the Florentine political and social world of the day, while she offers a more complete analysis of the ancient and medieval theoretical literature on tyranny; but we both agree that the tale is more about Gualtieri as a tyrant than about Griselda as a model wife.

- 2 *Decameron*, 1233. “Beastly” often seems to serve as code word or signal that the male so labelled has sexual appetites that are “unnatural” by Boccaccio’s standards and hence like those of a beast. If beastly is being used in that sense here, it would add another dimension to the Marquis’ rejection of marriage and the love of women, one that Boccaccio regularly paints in a negative light. Barolini provides an interesting discussion of the term drawing similar conclusions but emphasizes its echoes of Dante’s usage of the term, along with its classical and Aristotelian dimension—a perspective that would undoubtedly have had its weight for learned readers and listeners, but perhaps less for a broader audience at the time. Barolini, “Marquis of Saluzzo,” 25–26.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 1233; italics mine.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 1234.
- 5 The three are described as the young sons of a noble knight named Tebaldo from either the Lamberti or the Agolanti families—both Ghibelline families exiled from Florence in the late Middle Ages and thus suspect already in fourteenth-century Florence with its strong Guelf tradition.
- 6 Although it should be noted that the prospects of profits from loaning money to the English had become less appetizing after the recent failure of Florentine banks in 1342, in part caused by the King of England’s reneging on his debts to them. Actually, recent scholarship has argued that local bad loans in Tuscany and debts built up in the ongoing wars in the region were more responsible for the bank failures, but contemporary accounts tended to place a heavy emphasis on the King of England’s actions—perhaps as a way to divert attention from the more local issues involved. Barsella notes also this connection in “Tyranny and Obedience,” 74–75.
- 7 Ruggiero, *Machiavelli*, 163–211. This vision of *virtù* and its development across the Rinascimento in Italy is one of the central themes of my effort to reinterpret the period in my book *The Renaissance in Italy*. From this perspective, Boccaccio’s *Decameron* with its stress on *virtù* is a work that fits more in the world of fourteenth-century Italy than as a work of medieval literature as it is often characterized. Of course, many of his tales have medieval sources and echoes, but significantly they are rewritten with a very different set of values more characteristic of fourteenth-century Florence and the city-states of central and northern Italy.
- 8 Walter (Gualtieri) of Brienne actually makes an appearance in the *Decameron* in his own right as one of the nine “lovers” of the Sultan of Babylon’s daughter, and a quite bloody “lover” at that (II, 7). Boccaccio also wrote a quite uncomplimentary account of his life in his *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium*, Lib. IX, cap. 24.
- 9 *Decameron*, 1234. Dioneo, however, does follow this comment with what appears to be a compliment for this lack of desire to marry, “for which he was to be seen as very wise” (1234). Yet what follows undercuts the force of this apparently very traditional negative vision of marriage. And throughout the *Decameron* Boccaccio seems to provide an unusual number of tales that see well-matched marriages as positive and at least potentially happy.
- 10 For this see the discussion in Ruggiero, *Machiavelli*, 24–6, 172–73 and Giannetti, *Lelia’s Kiss*, 18, 131–34.
- 11 While the character Gualtieri had the same name as the recent Florentine would-be tyrant, this is not to argue that he was the only tyrant being referred to in the tale. In actuality Florence was surrounded by dangerous and aggressive tyrants who were capable of instilling fear in the city even if they were not named Gualtieri. As often noted, the fourteenth century, following in the footsteps of the thirteenth, was a period where republics were losing out to tyrants everywhere and Florence found themselves surrounded by aggressive *signori* on virtually all sides.
- 12 This lack of love also played a significant role in his lack of a positive relationship with his subjects, once again the micro-level of life, in this case marriage, reflecting the macro-level of life, in this case Gualtieri’s rule. Both lacked love and that stood literally at the heart of his negative consensus reality for his subjects and for the Florentine readers of his tale.
- 13 Clearly with the repetition of “insisting” and Gualtieri’s will, the tale is playing on will as a dangerous source of sin when misplaced as it is in this case. Of course, will from a

theological perspective is the basis of all sin, which in the end is merely willing to turn away from the good and ultimately God. In this case Gualtieri might be seen as willfully turning away from love, the good and God much like Satan turned away from love, the good and God in the greatest rejection of all. At this moment in the tale with his willing misdeed, it might be argued Gualtieri confirms his fallen state.

- 14 Barolini suggests that in these demands Gualtieri, unhappy with his subjects' calls for his marriage, is setting up a *beffa* at their expense—a very typical form of Florentine joke that in this case punishes them for forcing him to marry against his will—and the key to the *beffa* is forcing them in turn to accept the peasant wife that he will pick unbeknownst to them. Although there is a logic to this perspective, it seems more likely that contemporaries would have assumed the driving force in his decision to take a peasant as a wife was his belief that she would have to be totally subservient to him, something that Barolini stresses as well.
- 15 *Decameron*, 1235.
- 16 Although the text is clear that Gualtieri entered the house alone, the discussion between Gualtieri, the father, and Griselda requires that she had entered as well. Perhaps it is significant that she is so humble that her entering the house with Gualtieri does not require mention.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 1237.
- 18 The Ordinances of Justice were first passed in Florence on January 18, 1293 and while their meaning at the time has been much debated, they became with time a kind of civic monument to the ideal of Florence as a republic ruled by the *popolo* without the interference of the traditional Tuscan rural nobility, labeled magnates, who had once dominated the city. For the debate and the more complex reality of the Ordinances and the magnates themselves see my *Renaissance*, 77–82 and 94–97 and the overview of Najemy in *A History of Florence*, 81–89, 92–95, 135–38, and for a more detailed study see Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates*.
- 19 Suggestively, Petrarch in his rather different retelling of the tale, softens this act of prepotency and male power that once again here strongly underlines Gualtieri's cruelty and lack of required manners. He adds the telling detail that Gualtieri had Griselda surrounded by women of honor before she was stripped. Here we see how the tale could be changed to make it a hymn to a wise and careful husband anxious to arrange the right kind of marriage that would assure a matrimony that functioned as it should with the husband in command and the woman subservient and obedient. But Dioneo's careful scripting of Gualtieri's boorish and self-centered behavior in line with his high-handed ways that evoke the psychological violence of the old nobility, strongly suggest a very different vision of Gualtieri and his marriage—a negative vision in line with many of the tales about the injustices of arranged marriages in the *Decameron*.
- 20 *Decameron*, 1239.
- 21 One might note here that although Griselda is clearly a victim, she is hardly a heroine as often claimed by critics. There are in fact any number of actual female heroines in the *Decameron* whose tales were constructed to show their *virtù* and ability to control their own lives and virtually always their goal of winning a meaningful love in life and often in marriage. Perhaps the best example of this, and a virtual anti-Griselda tale, that gives the lie to Petrarch's and later critics' vision of Griselda as a model wife is the tale of Gilette of Narbonne (III, 9), who empowered by love cures the king of France and overcoming a series of seemingly impossible trials (typical of medieval lover's tales and more normally male knights) in the end thanks to her *virtù* wins the love of the man she loves, her husband, Bertrand of Roussillon. In this tale he is also portrayed as a cruel lord, but Gilette is anything but passive and takes her life in her own hands to win out in the end—a model of what a woman can accomplish with real *virtù* in the name of love. It is suggestive also that Gilette is an upper-class non-noble from an urban setting not unlike the Florentine readers of the *Decameron* and much more easily accepted as active and aggressive than the humble peasant Griselda. Similar *virtù* overcoming a husband both cruel and foolish is presented also in tale (II, 9) where a Genoese woman, who takes the name Sigurano da Finale, passes as a male and flourishes in a series of adventures thanks to her *virtù* and in the end recovers the love of the husband she loves despite his murderous misdeeds.

- 22 *Decameron*, 1241.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Ibid., 1242–43.
- 25 In fact, this is the only use of the term in the tale, usually she and her father are referred to as poor and it is noted that he is a swineherd not a laborer. The title of the tale refers to her as “una figliuola d’un villano” and later when referring to her unexpected *virtù*, her dress and by inference her status is referred to as “villesco”: “l’alta virtù di costei nascosa sotto i poveri panni e sotto l’abito villesco.”
- 26 For this see Brucker, *Florentine Politics*, 114; Najemy, *Florence*, 135–37. On the Ordinances see note 18 above.
- 27 Branca actually points out the textual parallels noting that in the story of Job I:20 he states “Nudus egressus sum . . . nudus revertar” in reference to Griselda’s “ignuda m’aveste . . . Io me n’andrò ignuda . . .” (1243). In the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, the famous lament of Job is rendered “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I shall return; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job I:20 [614]).
- 28 *Decameron*, 1244–45.
- 29 Ibid., 1246.
- 30 Ibid., 1247.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Critics have from time to time referred to the *Decameron* as “The Human Comedy” playing on an apparent contrast with Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, but I would suggest that Boccaccio’s comedy was more divine than it might at first seem and Dante’s more human.

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3

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE SIENESE STATE BEFORE AND AFTER THE FALL OF THE REPUBLIC

Elena Brizio

Sexual violence in Renaissance and early modern Siena was widespread, barely manageable, and apparently accepted, though not always legitimized, especially when it applied to particular social classes. Both the nobility and the clergy considered it their “right” to engage in behavior that underscored their social superiority.¹ This included not only the use of weapons, but also brawls, thievery, private vendettas, and sexual violence. Such behavior did not, however, pertain only to them: commoners also forcefully imposed their brutality, sexuality, and violence on less powerful victims who happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, or whose only fault was their vulnerability. But not all victims, whether male or female, endured violence passively. For everyone whose voice was not heard, there were many others who, in spite of their age or sex, protested the violence they had endured and described it in detail.

Unlike other Italian cities, medieval Siena did not have a single government office charged with the social control of the population and the suppression of behavior deemed to be unacceptable.² This changed in 1460 when the government established the office of the *Otto di custodia* (Eight in charge of Protection) to oversee behavior and public health.³ After several changes to its name and tasks, the office was abolished in 1541 by the Spanish protectorate, and then re-established in 1554 as the *Ufficiali sopra la pace* (Officers in charge of the Peace) in order to settle citizen disputes and prosecute both blasphemy and violence. Yet this incarnation was also short-lived, and the office was abolished at the fall of the Republic in 1555.⁴

The administration of justice was entrusted first to the Captain of the People (*Capitano del popolo*), and then to the Captain of Justice (*Capitano di giustizia*), before being abolished in 1481. Some of its tasks were entrusted to the Rota court in 1503, but in the event the 1481 suppression was not definitive, and the Captain of Justice seems to have recovered some functions in the first half of

the sixteenth century. The office of the Captain of Justice was formally revived when Duke Cosimo I de' Medici issued an edict on the "Reformation of the Government of the City and State of Siena." in 1561, and it acquired criminal jurisdiction over the city and the *podesterie* (the administrative structures into which the countryside was organized).⁵ The Captain of Justice also gained those tasks previously entrusted to the Criminal Judge (*Giudice dei malefizi*),⁶ and functioned under the supervision of the Governor (*Governatore*).⁷ The Governor was now the top official in the new administration. He enjoyed "broad political and administrative functions, supervised the public order, issued regulatory actions and had the control of all sentences of tribunals."⁸ All other magistrates lost their jurisdiction over criminal lawsuits.⁹

These frequent changes to judicial offices in Siena help us understand why documentation on crime is scattered throughout many different archival collections and series. It is also incomplete, because much material has been lost. As a result, it is not possible to analyze the Siennese records in as thorough a social or statistical way as it has been done for Florence.¹⁰ The preliminary analysis presented in this essay—which uses Siennese documents for the years just before and after the fall of the Republic (1555)—will serve to illustrate at least some cases of violence at a time in Siennese history that, from the perspective of the history of crime, still awaits detailed analysis.

A preliminary analysis reveals just the tip of the iceberg. One of the questions that arises from a first glance at the documentation is why so much of the surviving documentation refers to violence in the countryside and not in the city. Perhaps extra-judicial agreements between the parties, reached in order to avoid denunciation, were more common or widespread in the city. Or, perhaps, much of the documentation for urban violence has not survived to the present day.

In Siena, and especially in the Siennese countryside already devastated by war, famine, and other problems, Medicean legislation over criminal activities took a long time to be applied and become the norm. One of the reasons for this was that the countryside suffered from a very slow reconstruction process. It took not only time, but a lot of effort, to erode and limit local authorities and personal powers that, for decades after the fall of the republic, continued to impose a social code that penalized those on the lower levels of the social scale.

What the law said

The rubric on sexual violence in the last republican Siennese statute (1545) followed medieval precedent and listed only adultery, rape, and abduction, in that order, as crimes of violence.¹¹ Sexual intercourse with a married woman of whatever social rank or with an unmarried virgin was punishable by the imposition of a financial penalty; abduction for the purpose of sexual violence, on the other hand, was punishable by death. The definition of sexual violence required that the abductor (*raptor*) marry the victim, if the father or the senior male members of her family deemed it appropriate, or alternatively that he provide her with

a dowry. If sexual violence was perpetrated against someone's wife or daughter, it damaged the honor of the husband and the family, so the culprit had to, somehow, adequately restore that damaged honor.¹² Sexual violence by men on men, described in the statute as "a dreadful kind of violence that is used against nature on men," demanded that the rapist be jailed and pay a fine, but if the rapist was over forty years old, he was to be burned at the stake.¹³ The regulation in the Duchy of Florence was similar: in 1542 Duke Cosimo I revised the law against "the nefarious, detestable, and abominable vice of sodomy" and not only increased the fines but also imposed physical punishments and even the death penalty on repeat offenders.¹⁴

Once Siena had been ceded by King Philip II of Spain to the Medici in 1557 and incorporated into the duchy of Tuscany, the 1558 revision of the Florentine law on sexual violence also applied to the city. This revised law removed the fines and imposed only physical punishments for "those who will use force and violence to women and men to satisfy their sexual desire."¹⁵ If the violence did not lead to an effusion of blood, the culprit was to be sent to the galleys for a certain number of years to serve as a chained rower; if, on the other hand, there had been an effusion of blood the culprit was to be executed. The only exception allowed, and this only for Florentine and Siennese citizens, was commuting the sentence to the galleys into a jail term, but this only at the discretion of Duke Cosimo I. Such discretion generally depended on the social rank, personal reputation, and family honor of the culprit.

The rape of women and young girls

The new law was tested almost immediately. "Since this case was of such manifest enormity, and the first since the publication of Your Excellency's last pronouncement against violence on men and women":¹⁶ so begins a letter by Orazio Camaiani (or Camaini),¹⁷ a diligent official and Captain of Justice in the "New State" (*Stato Nuovo*) of Siena, to Duke Cosimo I de' Medici in the winter of 1559. Camaiani went on to relate a case of attempted sexual violence against "a poor widow of Belforte" who, on resisting her attacker, was hit by him so hard that she bled.¹⁸ Camaiani's information came not from first-hand observation, but from letters he had received from the vicar of Belforte (fol. 13r), a small mountain-top hamlet about 45 km west of Siena. It included all the necessary negative requirements—night, loneliness, violence. The "poor widow," who is never named in the letter,¹⁹ had been assaulted during the night in her own home by two men who entered on purpose in order to rape her; she resisted the attack, screamed loudly, and was wounded in the head and face. Her attackers ran away without succeeding in their intent. The widow did, however, recognize one of her attackers, "a certain Terenzio Usinini, Siennese" (fol. 13r) and reported him. The Captain of Justice thus knew for whom to look. The information was sent to Duke Cosimo I, but what has survived is scattered and incomplete. It does, however, point to the many cases of violence in a territory that was still suffering

from the aftermath of the raids and devastations brought about by the recent Florentine conquest of Siena (1552–59) and the republic's difficult process of submission to its new Florentine lord.

We know very little about Terenzio Usinini. There is no record of his having been baptized in Siena,²⁰ so we can assume that he was born and baptized in the countryside. He also does not appear among the very few Usinini who held secondary appointments in Siennese offices.²¹ His family *pedigree* or that fact that the family belonged to one of the major political groups in Siena, the Monte of the Riformatori, were of no help to him—in referring to Terenzio, the Captain of Justice noted that “a worst name against a person cannot be heard in the entire town.”²² In fact, Terenzio did not have a good reputation—after hearing that he had been accused of attempted rape, other women in town went to the Captain of Justice to report that he had raped them, too, or had attempted to do so. Terenzio managed to escape arrest on this occasion, but his accomplice, a priest, was not as fortunate—he was captured thanks to a peasant who tricked him with the help of a woman who was priest's former lover. The incomplete records do not tell us what happened to either Terenzio or the priest. We can, however, determine that Terenzio seems to have been a violent highborn individual who behaved as if he were above the law and thought he could force his sexual desires upon subordinate women. This may, in fact, be to a certain extent true because Terenzio seems to have managed somehow to escape justice.

While highborn locals might have been able to get away with sexual violence and escape justice, the sexual misbehavior of state officials, who were to uphold the legal system, was more problematic, especially when such officials used their power to abuse women and girls. Already in 1378, Pietro Averani from Asti, a district judge was dismissed because he had used the power of his office (*sub pre-textu officii*) to rape a young virgin girl living in Siena.²³

In a case from 1554, a community in the countryside asked the government in Siena to “immediately” send another commissioner to replace the current one whose violence against some local women was such that it was about to cause serious disorders. One “young, respectable, and good” local woman even went to Siena herself and, in tears, described to the magistrates how the said commissioner had come into her house at night on the excuse of seeing how the soldiers had been billeted and had started to lay his hands on her, at which point she had begun to scream and he stopped.²⁴ Though problematic, the sexual misbehavior of this representative of the legal system seems to have elicited little more than a request for removal from the post or relocation, and no actual physical punishment meted out on the guilty party. We do not know whether this was the limit of what plaintiffs could expect.

In a different case, blasphemy was added to the charge of attempted violence. This rendered the accusation much more dangerous because blasphemy was considered an “open crime,” that is, clear and public. Angela reported that Bastiano, the servant of the Bargello (that is, of the chief of police), “on many occasions requested her honor from her.”²⁵ After beating her several times because she

refused, he entered her house while her husband was away and tried to rape her, at which point she started screaming. After threatening her, “he pointed the dagger at her throat saying ‘whore of God, if you scream I will slaughter you,’” but she continued to scream and so he left.

The examples given so far point to a somewhat spontaneous, even impulsive attempt on the part of the men to engage in sex with an unwilling woman. There are also cases of carefully planned attempts. Agnoletto the Corsican, for example, not knowing how other to seduce a young woman, did so by impersonating a priest; “because he did not know how else to rape a young girl, he took the clothes the archpriest wore during Lent and, dressed like him, started confessing her in church.” This particular record continues by pointing out that Agnoletto “raped many women and did other impudent things.”²⁶ We have further examples of premeditated rape. A notary reports that Pompeo di Giovanni from Monticello, a 45-year-old man, married and with two daughters, had engaged in “robberies, rapes and, in general, all other sorts of abuses done and committed” including “raping, together with other men, Iacoma the daughter of Filippo, his relative,” and of “having prided himself for having entered through the roof into Antonia di Censio’s house only to have sex with her and perhaps he did so, and because there was no point in screaming she, for the sake of her honor, kept quiet about it.” The notary continues his report with the comment that he “will remain silent on what Pompeo did to certain poor young women who were walking by” and then concludes by recording that Pompeo was eventually found guilty of a long list of robberies and sentenced to the gallows.²⁷

After the Council of Trent (1545–63), a new detail enters into notarial descriptions of sexual violence: some defendants now tried to justify themselves by explaining that they had been tempted by the devil. In 1571, Sandro was accused of raping five-year-old Santina in a wheat field and causing her to bleed from her vagina.²⁸ In his defense, Sandro told the Captain of Justice that when he went in the field to “shout at some children doing some damage,” Santina and Elisabetta came by. Sandro was then

tempted by the devil to sit down and grab the said Santina and put her on his lap, and having pulled out his tail [i.e. penis] through the opening of his trousers, he inserted the second finger of his right hand into Santina’s nature [i.e., vagina] and, having seen that it could enter easily, took out his finger and started pointing his tail towards her nature and, in so doing, he could have hurt her and she shouted one or two times.

Hearing the little girl scream, her uncle Domenico rushed to help her and found her crying and “totally wrecked and bloody.” He hit Sandro with a bow he had in his hands and moved him away from the girl. Sandro later confessed that

since he could not put his member inside Santina’s nature, he was about to finish [i.e. ejaculate] between her thighs or in some other way as best he

could because the devil grabbed him by the hair and he [Sandro] could not stop himself, but the said Domenico stopped him.

Sandro's deposition claims that when he was raping the girl he was not his own self, but was under the control of the devil to the point that he was not physically able to do otherwise until an external force, Domenico, interrupted him and stopped the devil's control.

Referring directly to the 1558 law mentioned above, the Captain of Justice pointed out that, in cases of violence with effusion of blood, the accused must incur the death penalty. Perhaps to elicit a more merciful sentence, the Captain of Justice described Sandro as "a young man between 25 and 30 years old, a bachelor, and more a fool than a scoundrel." The plea was successful—Sandro was spared his life and received the lighter sentence of "two or three years in the galleys."

A matter of honor, but whose honor?

In a letter of March 1524 to the government in Siena, Bartolomeo di Camillo, at that time *podestà* (chief magistrate) of Sarteano, reported a disturbing case of rape:

A certain local man, Agnolo di Ipolito, entered into the house of a certain Giovanni Baptista Tucci, a citizen of Siena, and found a daughter whose name is Iuditta, who is around fourteen-years-old and not yet married, and violently took her and because she did not consent, he started hitting her and eventually he raped her by force so that he broke her nature.²⁹

Podestà Petrucci then went on to say that:

It seemed to me that, since I am in this town, for the honor of your Excellencies first and for my own honor secondly, I had to bring this shameful case to your attention so that it will not go unpunished.

Petrucci explained how he sent soldiers to Agnolo's house to arrest him, but the accused was defended by one of his brothers and other relatives, as well as by the town's priors. Because the victim's father, Giovanni Baptista Tucci, was a Sienese citizen, Sienese statutes applied and overrode Sarteano's local customs and statute (*capitoli*). Petrucci thus assumed that he had the authority, as *podestà* of Sarteano, to deal with the case, so "In a friendly way, I let the Priori know that I did not want to bypass their local customs, but I wanted [to uphold] my honor." The situation quickly deteriorated and one of Agnolo's relatives fired "two rifle shots together with offensive words" against the *podestà*. Another relative, Petrucci reports, "told me, answering back, that if I would have gone to his house, he would have punched not only me, but Christ himself."

Two days later, Petrucci reported that news of the rape had reached one of the subordinate judges in his podestarial team, and that this judge, together with some soldiers, went once again at Agnolo's house to arrest him. Agnolo's uncle, Ser Giovanni di Gabriello, threatened them, saying that if the judge tried to get in, he would throw bricks or stones at him. In his report to Siena, Petrucci underlines the fact that "Your Excellencies know that these actions are done against you, that in this place I am your delegate, and that in order to preserve your honor I am ready to give my life." Two days after this, Cardinal Giovanni Piccolomini, archbishop of Siena, wrote from Rome to the Sienese Concistoro (the lords and main officers) in support of Ser Giovanni; perhaps as a way to show that Ser Giovanni enjoyed important connections and patronage, or perhaps as an attempt to limit more severe outcomes. "Because they had some other enmities [in town]" cardinal Piccolomini informed the Concistoro, Ser Giovanni di Gabriello and his relatives did not recognize, in the darkness of the night, the *podestà's* soldiers and so they defended themselves. He added that Ser Giovanni "in a good-natured and simple way used some inappropriate words" without realizing that he was speaking to the *podestà* and his soldiers. Cardinal Piccolomini continued that he was certain that the lords of Siena would recognize "the good faith of this country town and in particular of the family and household of said Ser Giovanni who have always been good servants of our city" and suggested that the lords "might show all possible leniency." A month later, *podestà* Petrucci happily wrote:

Magnificent, excellent and powerful lords [. . .] in order to carry out what your Excellencies have ordered [. . .] I sent for Giovan Baptista Tucci, his wife, and his daughter on the matter of what Agnolo di Ipolito had done, and about the marriage that has to be contracted between them.³⁰

Clearly, the legal solution reached in this case of rape was for the rapist to marry his victim. The records do not indicate what Iuditta, the victim, might have thought of such a solution, or even what she felt about the entire case. There is no trace of her in the reports or the letters. What is ever-present, instead, is the matter of honor—the honor of Siena, of its magistrates, and their delegate, of the town of Sarteano and its priors and local statutes; of Agnolo's family; of Tucci's family; and of Iuditta's own self, which would now be restored through marriage with her assailant. In all of this, the discourse is male while the female voice of Iuditta is completely absent.

The rape of young boys

Rocco from Campiglia confessed under torture that, while he was at home eating, a certain Curtio, a little boy around eight years old, entered his house and asked him for something to eat; the said Rocco grabbed him and laid him over a table and, having lifted his clothes, put his tail [penis] between the boy's butt cheeks with the intention of knowing him carnally.

The boy's screams stopped Rocco from proceeding any further in the attempted rape. Under questioning, Rocco admitted that "he did put [his penis] between the boy's thighs but then finished the job with his hands."³¹ In light of the accusation and confession, the Captain of Justice in 1571 asked not only that the usual fine for such sodomitical activities to be levied on Rocco, but also that he be given jail time on account of "the young age of the boy." The request for jail time may point to the Captain of Justice's understanding of the aggravating factor in the case (the boy's tender age) and, perhaps, to his personal feelings about it, but the bureaucratic language of the report does not allow us to delve further into the case nor to understand more fully how Rocco himself might have justified his aggression of Curtio. It does, however, point to the risks and dangers that came with child poverty (Curtio entered the house to ask for food) and the opportunistic behavior of men in the grip of sexual impulses.

The charges levelled a few years earlier in 1567 against Giovanni, a 25-year-old man from Sinalunga, "strong and well-shaped," were many and varied.³² The records tell that that he was "in jail, indicted for having carnally known a she-ass and also for having used the nefarious *sin* [sic] vice of sodomy." He was also accused of having sodomized Salvatore, a boy of "around four or five years of age and of having broken his *ass* [sic] sex." Salvatore was not the only boy Giovanni had attempted to sodomize; he had done the same to "another little boy [also named Giovanni] of the same age [as Salvatore] or a little more", but this boy managed to run away crying. Under "rather rigorous torture," Giovanni explained that he had found a she-ass along the way, moved her off the public road and into a scrub where,

he felt the need to mount her and so, approaching her from the back, he put his member into her nature, but because she did not stop moving and grazing, after having kept it there for a little while, he pulled it out and climaxed as he did so.

Giovanni also confessed to having taken little Salvatore to a vineyard where,

having lifted his clothes, he directed his natural member into the boy's *ass* [sic] sex, but because the boy was small he could not insert it more than two fingers, and because this was hurting the little boy, the boy started to struggle and scream so Giovanni let him go and climaxed outside, and he did not notice that he had broken the boy's sex or caused an effusion of blood.

An aunt of the little boy declared, instead, that when little Salvatore came home "the blood was running down his thighs and his *ass* [sic] sex was chapped." Giovanni justified himself saying that when they were in a barn he told the child "if you come here, I will fuck you" and then added that "it is not true that he wanted to sodomize him." The records conclude that "in line with the statutes

of this city, it does not look as if Giovanni is subject to capital punishment," even though blood had been spilled, "but we could condemn him to the galleys, with the approval" of the Governor. Aside from the various crimes listed in this deposition (bestiality, sodomy, child abuse, physical violence causing bleeding), there is an interesting idiosyncrasy in the records. The notary seems to have had second thoughts about some of the words he was using and seems to have felt compelled to attenuate the language; he did so by striking out some words and substituting them with more neutral, though still very precise, terms. As a result, "ass" became "sex" and "sin" became "vice." While the first correction suggests an attempt to use terminology that is less vulgar or vernacular in favor of a more technical term, the second suggests the presence of a moral consideration whereby the Christian concept of "sin" is replaced by the more secular concept of "vice."

All the previous cases deal with sexual violence in the countryside or smaller towns in the region. The only case of sexual violence I have found in the city of Siena itself involved a young apprentice working in a slaughterhouse in the district of Fontebranda.³³ Ascanio accused the butcher Lando, an associate of his employer Orlando, of having sodomized him in the slaughterhouse and having beaten him for resisting. Ascanio explained that it happened "in the workshop when we were going to stretch the tallow in the workshop dais" (fol. 169v). When Ascanio turned down Lando's sexual request, Lando "took me by the arms, tore the lace off my leggings and lowered them. Then he lowered my head, came into me from behind, and did his wicked things [*poltronerie*] to me, and once he had done them, he punched me twice in the back." Ascanio told the court that he informed his employer Orlando, who in turn informed the shop boys working with Lando as well as other people. Ascanio's accusation was, however, undermined by his own admission that he had already, on several occasions, been the passive partner in same-sex intercourse with soldiers in Montalcino and with a soldier in Siena in the service of Cornelio Bentivoglio (fol. 170v).

In other words, Ascanio had previously been sexually active with other men. Perhaps for this reason Lando did not suspect at first that he had been arrested for having sodomized Ascanio, but thought, instead, that he had been arrested for having beaten him (fol. 171r). Questioned on the details of what happened in the slaughterhouse, Lando reported that perhaps Ascanio had misinterpreted his joking words "what do you think, come here I want to fuck you." This led the judge to interrogate Ascanio once again, this time with his hands tied. The youth once again declared that "Lando started beating me and wanted to force me and he bent me over and sodomized me" (fol. 172r), but this time Ascanio added that he did not resent his having been beaten. Ascanio was then questioned a third time, this time in front of Lando, who maintained his defensive line saying: "I told him jokingly 'come here, I want to fuck you' because he did not want to come." Interrogated again, Lando confirmed "I ordered him to bring the tallow and to stretch it up, but I did not do anything with him nor with anyone else" (fol. 172v). Ascanio, too, continued to affirm his own version of events pointing

out that this happened not only at Lando's slaughterhouse, but once also at Fontebranda (where Ascanio refused to go along with the attempted sodomy). When Lando kept saying that the accusation was levelled at him because of the beating he had given Ascanio, the latter asked the judge call other witnesses saying, "let the shop boys come here and they will tell you what I told you" (fol. 173r). In the end, Ascanio's situation became quite complicated as he paradoxically changed from being the accuser to being the accused. He was jailed (allegedly on charges of sodomy), but on 25 December, in celebration of the Nativity, he was pardoned and released "by decree of the lords" (fol. 173r).³⁴

Several factors worked against Ascanio. His position as an apprentice was perhaps too weak to sustain the charges he levelled against a master butcher such as Lando, or to raise doubts about the truth of Lando's deposition. In a situation such as this, the court seems to have given credence to the more senior and more socially respectable individual. Similarly, the fact that Ascanio's employer failed to support him in his case must have raised suspicions. Lastly, Ascanio's admission of having previously engaged in same-sex intercourse with soldiers both in Siena and in Montalcino worked against him. Although Ascanio had the courage to denounce a superior for a sexual crime that was not uncommon, his social status and his previous sexual encounters with men not only placed his testimony in doubt, but actually served to find him guilty and put him in jail.

The clergy and violence

After Siena fell to Florentine forces in 1555 the Siennese government and part of the Siennese population moved to Montalcino, a small town about 40 km due south of Siena, in a last attempt to resist the conquest and preserve the centuries-old republic. Among the volumes of deliberations that have survived from the "Republic of Siena retired in Montalcino" (*Repubblica di Siena ritirata in Montalcino*) there is the denunciation deposited by Mona Antilia di Andrea, a woman living in Castelnuovo dell'Abate, in which she asks for justice for her eight-year-old son who, she reports, has been "damaged" (*guasto*) by the French friar Carlo who worked at the *ospedale* (hospital or hospice) attached to the Olivetan abbey of Sant'Antimo, in the plains just below Castelnuovo.³⁵ The Siennese authorities summoned the friar to appear in court within three days to defend himself against the accusation that "he had had sodomitical intercourse with the said young boy and had broken his ass" ("di havere fatto culifragio"). Because the friar was French, the court decided to inform the French Marshal Blaise de Lasseran-Massencome, seigneur de Monluc, who had commanded the French troops during the defense of Siena and had then moved to Montalcino with the Siennese government and exiles. A week later, Monluc was informed that the friar had been arrested in Piancastagnaio where the *podestà* was told to keep the Frenchman in jail and under close surveillance until further notice. About a month later, the friar was transferred to the Franciscan convent in Montalcino

where the friars were advised of his alleged crime, told to guard him well, and await further orders.

At this point, the documents fall silent and we do not know what further ensued with Friar Carlo. We are thus left with no information on what he might have said in his defense, what further evidence the mother and the boy might have brought into consideration against him, or what the final verdict might have been. What we do have, however, is the record of a mother asking for justice against a foreign clergyman who was the subject of, and possibly defended by, a powerful foreign military figure in the region, this during a difficult moment in a war that had devastated the countryside and brought about the near-total collapse of the government and the republic. Civic and moral regulations were still in effect, but the silence of the incomplete records and the transfer of the accused friar to another convent, rather than to a city jail, seem to imply that such regulations had not been strictly applied and that the friar probably escaped justice.

The Sienese government, whether in exile or not, was not the only jurisdiction to deal with sexual violence by the clergy. Ecclesiastical courts also dealt with sexual crimes, as we can see from the records in the fonds of *Cause criminali* housed at the Archiepiscopal Archive in Siena.³⁶ The collection includes the precepts, that is the summons to appear in court, and some of the trial records, but once again many of the files are incomplete. In fact, in the majority of documents and final sentences issued by the archbishop's vicar are missing, so this case can only be known in its general outlines.

Menica and the priest Ser Mauro Criti

One case for which we do have a complete set of documents deals with the charges levelled against the priest Ser Mauro Criti, rector of Campriano di Murlo, a hamlet 17 km south of Siena.³⁷ According to the charges brought forth by the victim's father, the priest used an excuse to enter the accuser's house and, finding the man's twelve- or thirteen-year-old daughter Menica alone at home, tried to sweet-talk her by asking her if she wanted him to buy her a pair of shoes. Aware of the priest's intentions, Menica responded with "I want God to give you a misfortune." Ser Mauro "then reached out for her neck and kissed her and tried to do something else, but she yelled." Menica's shouts were heard by Laura Pasquinetti, a nine-year-old girl who arrived just in time to see the priest leave. He pretended to throw some snow against the window, and said to Menica: "Be quiet, you little beast, I'll buy you a pair of shoes." Menica's father asked that the priest be justly punished, having damaged both his and his daughter's honor, even though he had to admit that "he could not prove the fact, except as he had told it, because when it happened there was no one else at home."

Although the evidence came from two under-age girls, Menica and Laura, the court was nonetheless obliged to pursue the case. A note signed by Filippo

Andreoli, secretary of the Governor of Siena, Federico Barbolano di Montauto, laid out the guidelines the vicar was to follow:

The very reverend vicar of the most reverend lord archbishop of Siena will make sure that in the states of His Highness [Duke Cosimo I de' Medici] crimes committed by priests will not go unpunished and he will not fail to ensure that both public honesty and private interest are upheld.

With this note, Andreoli was referring to the 1558 Florentine law on sexual violence and Cosimo's determination that it be applied evenly and universally. The trial, which lasted almost a year, gathered testimonies not only from the two girls who had been ocular witnesses, but also from many other people, and brought to light the fact that the priest was no saint.

At first, the interrogation of Ser Mauro revolved around what he did that day. His responses claimed that his conduct had not been socially improper—he said that when he called at the house and realized that no adult was present he simply went away (fol. 4v). He stubbornly denied having thrown snow at the window, but admitted to having thrown snow elsewhere that day, as confirmed by other witnesses. Brought in for questioning once again, this time with Menica in the room, Ser Mauro reacted with surprise and fear at seeing the girl (fol. 13r), who accused him without fear (fol. 13v). From the examination of other witnesses, the vicar learned that Ser Mauro had also been physically and sexually violent with Caterina, a young girl about fourteen years old, unmarried, who had been brought up by a certain Bernardino. According to testimony, Ser Mauro had “misled and kidnaped Caterina [. . .] brought her to his house, where he kept her for several weeks, raping her and using her contrary to the law [*contra forma iuris*]” (fol. 23v). He also sought to take advantage of Hieronima, the servant of a priest who had previously been stationed in Campriano. Ser Mauro asked her to wash his clothes in exchange for his giving lessons to one of her sons and then added that he would “give her more affection than the other priest”, and this contrary to the law [*contra forma iuris*] (fol. 23v). Other witnesses reported that the priest was a confirmed card player and always had with him a deck of cards “that he says is a present from a beautiful girl” (fol. 30v). Ser Mauro denied everything, even under torture, but was found guilty nonetheless and fined 100 lire, removed from his church in Campriano, and confined in Siena for two years.

Filippo and the presbyter Ser Cristofano

Another case heard by the bishop's court in Grosseto deals with a mother who brought charges against a priest who had raped her son. Monna Caterina, a thirty-year-old widow living in Campagnatico, in the outskirts of Grosseto, reported that the presbyter Ser Cristofano “has raped my little son Filippo.”³⁸ The narrative she provides illustrates a mother's care and a young victim's shame. “For the past year I have sent my Filippo to his [Ser Cristofano's] school and

one evening when he came back one I noticed he was unhappy and very sad.” Caterina asked what was going on, but Filippo refused to answer. Later that evening, when she was “undressing him to put him in bed, I saw his shirt very bloody and I asked him what blood was this.” Filippo confessed that on that day, the priest had called him in his bedroom and had given him a book and he had approached him and while he pretended to teach him, he did that horrible thing on the back, and because the little boy yelled, he hit him few times. Ser Cristofano threatened the boy not to reveal anything to me nor to someone else and so, “looking carefully at the boy, I saw that he had hurt him and had broken his ass and so I decided he would not attend school anymore.” In her testimony, Caterina also reported that she heard that Ser Cristofano had raped “Monna Lena, a widow at that time” and that rumor went around the entire countryside that “he torn her behind.” But what troubled Caterina more was that she and Ser Cristofano were cousins³⁹—presumably, she did not understand the reason behind his “bad behavior” against his twelve-year-old nephew Filippo.

When the bishop’s vicar interrogated young Filippo, the story matched closely with what his mother had reported. Both accounts pointed to a familiar closeness and confidence that the presbyter had showered on Filippo in order to sodomize him. Filippo recounted:

I know Ser Cristofano of Ventura, the priest in Campagnatico and my kin, and I attended his school for a year or perhaps more and one evening, after the other pupils had left, I remained there to serve him at dinner and after he had dined he stood up and he went to sit on a chair in his bedroom and he called me. After I made the bed, we went back and he sat again on the same chair. Then he gave me an illustrated book and he put me between his legs: he untied my pants and lifted up my shirt and put his thing into my ass and caused me pain. I started to scream and asked him to let me go, but he was holding me and he was thrashing and kept telling me “be quiet, be quiet” and he closed my mouth so I could not scream and he put his thing into my ass and then he let me go. I went home and, along the way, I could not walk because he hurt me in the ass and I was bleeding and I went to bed and my mother saw my shirt and I think she believed it was scabies because at that time I had it, and then I told her: and she did not want me to go to school again and I did not go anymore.

In response to a direct question, Filippo answered, “I never saw nor do I know whether Ser Cristofano did something like this to any other student.”⁴⁰

Family relation was the justification Ser Cristofano used to keep Filippo back, have him serve dinner, and make the bed. Once there, he used the “illustrated book” to entice the boy enough to sodomize him, counting on the fact that Caterina, as a widow, did not have a husband to defend the family or take action against the presbyter, whose social and cultural position in town served, in part, to protect him.

Reading the document with modern eyes, we note Caterina's maternal sensitivity: she immediately realized that Filippo was unhappy and hiding something. Her understanding of her son and her emotional connection with him were strong and deep. She also had aspirations for her son, enough to send him to be educated by a learned relative who might open doors in life for the boy. In spite of this, Caterina was not about to accept her cousin's violence against her son and reacted quickly and with determination: "I did not want him to go to his school anymore" she told the vicar's notary, and then, perhaps to temper her rage, added "I consider him [Ser Cristofano] a wicked man [*tristo*]"⁴¹ because he raped my little boy Filippo." Although Filippo was about twelve years old at the time, Caterina referred to him as a *citto* (little boy), using a typically vague term for a child that could be adapted to the legal necessities of the moment—in her eyes, Filippo was an innocent child and not a possibly compliant youth. In fact, the records do point to Filippo's physical weakness and to his inability to deal forcefully enough with the situation to avoid the rape—caught by surprise, he reacted strongly and screamed, but to no avail because the priest's adult strength, his shutting Filippo's mouth to prevent the boy from screaming, and his repeated command to the boy to "be quiet" while he raped him all contributed to overpower and subdue Filippo. The consequences of the priest's violence were not only physical—lacerations, bleeding, pain—but also psychological—the boy's depression and silence on his return home.

While in cases of anal rape in Venice, the authorities, already in the fifteenth century, sought the help of surgeons and barbers to examine and report on the lesions and physical damage done to the victim's body,⁴² this was not the case in Siena. There is no trace of such provisions in the surviving statutes of the Sienese barber surgeons' guild.⁴³ The only reference I have found to an obligation to report on wounded persons is a decree of February 1556 (reissued in 1563) signed Governor Ferdinando Barbolani di Montauto, which refers to wounds in a general way, and not to wounds specifically caused by sexual violence or sodomy.⁴⁴

In a case of some years later, a certain Arcangelo charged the chaplain Ser Andrea with having sodomized his eight-year-old son Sabbatino, who had been a boarding student in the chaplain's school, and with having threatened him (Arcangelo) with a weapon.⁴⁵ Arcangelo reported that "one night, while sleeping in bed with Sabbatino, Ser Andrea sodomized him forcibly and against Sabbatino's will, so that he broke his ass and then abandoned him." As he was being raped, the young boy screamed and was heard by a neighbor. The physical damage done to Sabbatino was such that he could not walk. Arcangelo heard of this from a local miller who presumably heard the news through the small talk of the neighbors, and went to the chaplain's house to get his son and take him home. A few days later, Arcangelo went to pick Sabbatino's things, but the chaplain refused to return them. In front of other people, the chaplain threatened Arcangelo with a hatchet while "another man who is in his house took an harquebus." Ser Andrea's violent behavior was not limited to Sabbatino:

Arcangelo reported that “he has sodomized four more little boys,” among them two of the miller’s sons.

Conclusion

The case studies presented in this essay point to a much larger corpus of documents dealing with legal cases against perpetrators of crimes of sexual violence. A first observation we might draw from the evidence presented is that, ten years after the publication and implementation of the 1558 Florentine law against sexual violence, cases were still being handled with leniency towards the accused—at least in Sienese territory. In spite of mounting evidence that included precise and detailed information from the victims, supporting evidence from eye-witnesses and other people, and in spite of the use of torture (in a few cases) to extract further information or confirm previously given information, alleged culprits seem generally to have received lenient sentences that spared their life. What is also striking is that all defendants denied the allegations raised against them, even under torture. In their defense, the accused used standard diversion tactics in order to have the case dismissed or the penalty reduced. This included suggesting that the children’s allegations were reliable because of their young age, or the fact that the children may have been prompted by others to say things that were not true, or that they had been instructed on what to say in order to build a case against the accused.

Was this sexual violence against minors “normal” at the time? To modern eyes, the cases and evidence presented here may seem extreme and even unbelievable, and some contemporaries probably felt the same way. Yet, as Ottavia Niccoli reminds us,

we must not imagine a constant in “human nature” that might allow us to apply our criteria, our sensibility, our perceptions to people who lived five or six hundred years ago, except in very general terms. The mental frame of our ancestors was, in fact, and at least under some aspects, very different from ours.⁴⁶

We can observe that those mothers, fathers, and relatives who sought justice for their victimized children did so without fear of the court, or public opinion, or the bureaucratic lengths of time the process would entail. We can also note how local communities were not sympathetic towards people in positions of authority who behaved in improper ways towards the young people they were supposed to educate, defend, and protect.

The Sienese evidence suggest that these cases, unlike those in Florence or Venice, were not about voluntary choices.⁴⁷ These were not cases of same-sex consensual sodomy or prostitution for profit. These were violent acts perpetrated by men in power over young people who could not defend themselves. As Patricia Labalme aptly said, “although there is herein much to pity and much to

protest, this is a story without a moral.”⁴⁸ The evidence from the Sienese records points to the same conclusion.

Notes

- 1 Di Simplicio, “La criminalità.” For the later period, Di Simplicio, *Peccato penitenza perdono*.
- 2 For the case of violent behavior in Bologna see Niccoli, *Il seme della violenza*.
- 3 Archivio di Stato di Siena (hereafter ASSi), *Guida Inventario*, 105, 119–23.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 105.
- 5 Cantini, *Legislazione Toscana*, vol. IV, 120.
- 6 ASSi, *Guida Inventario*, 121.
- 7 Cantini, *Legislazione Toscana*, vol. IV, 120.
- 8 ASSi, *Guida Inventario*, 123.
- 9 Cantini, *Legislazione Toscana*, vol. IV, 117.
- 10 For social aspects, see Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*. For statistical aspects, see Zorzi, “The Judicial System.”
- 11 Ascheri, ed., *L'ultimo statuto*, III. 76 “De poena adulterii, stupri et raptus,” 315.
- 12 Brackett, *Criminal Justice*, 111.
- 13 Ascheri, ed., *L'ultimo statuto*, III. 79 “De poena sodomitarum,” 316.
- 14 Cantini, *Legislazione Toscana*, vol. I, 211–12.
- 15 *Ibid.*, vol. III, 267–68.
- 16 Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASFi), *Mediceo del Principato* (hereafter MdP) 1869, fol. 13r (February 16, 1559).
- 17 Giansante, “Camaiani Onofrio.”
- 18 ASFi, MdP 1869, fol. 27r.
- 19 It may be possible that she is “domina Francisca relicta quondam Michelagnoli Iacobi de Belforte” with whom Terenzio had disagreements for some quantities of wheat, ASSi, *Curia del Placito* 750, not foliated (November 4, 1555).
- 20 He does not appear in ASSi, Ms A 33, fol. 305r (*battezzati*), a compilation of baptismal records from church registers in the Baptistry and civic records in the office of the Biccherna.
- 21 ASSi, Ms A 39, fol. 203r (*riseduti*).
- 22 ASFi, MdP 1869, fol. 21b^{isr}.
- 23 ASSi, *Notarile ante cosimiano* 99, not foliated. Pietro was also *legum doctor*.
- 24 ASSi, *Concistoro* 2453 ad datam (April 18, 1554).
- 25 ASSi, *Capitano di giustizia* 645, fols. 17r–19r (August 1570).
- 26 ASSi, *Repubblica di Siena ritirata in Montalcino* 63, *passim* (1557).
- 27 ASSi, *Biccherna* 1127, fol. 24v (1544); ASSi, *Capitano di giustizia* 645, fol. 94r–v (July 1571).
- 28 ASSi, *Governatore* 436, fol. 86r–v (June 28, 1571).
- 29 ASSi, *Concistoro* 2081, not foliated (March 20–24 1524).
- 30 ASSi, *Concistoro* 2080, not foliated (April 26, 1524).
- 31 ASSi, *Capitano di giustizia* 645, fol. 78r–v (May 29, 1571).
- 32 ASSi, *Capitano di giustizia* 611, fols. 138v–139r (April 8, 1567).
- 33 ASSi, *Capitano di giustizia* 150, fols. 169v–173r (November 2, 1555).
- 34 It was common custom to free some prisoners during the most important religious celebrations.
- 35 ASSi, *Repubblica di Siena ritirata in Montalcino* 5, not numbered (April 29, 1555).
- 36 Archivio Arcivescovile di Siena (hereafter AASi), *L'Archivio Arcivescovile di Siena*, ed. G. Catoni and S. Fineschi (Rome: 1970).
- 37 AASi, *Cause criminali* 5509, insert 3 (January 23–December 6, 1569).
- 38 AASi, *Cause criminali* 5502, insert 4 (May 5–September 1, 1552).
- 39 “To me he is a cousin brother” (“a me è fratello consobрино”), that is, a cousin born to a sister of Caterina’s mother.

- 40 “For a similar case, see Marcello, “Società maschile e sodomia.”
- 41 The Treccani Italian vocabulary defines as *tristo* a person who has a bad attitude.
- 42 In 1467 the Council of Ten issued a law that obliged doctors to report “anyone treated for damages resulting from anal intercourse”; see Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*, 117.
- 43 ASSi, *Arti* 37 (1593–1776).
- 44 ASSi, *Statuti di Siena* 64, fol. 72r.
- 45 AASi, *Cause criminali* 5504, insert 4 (February 19–March 5, 1559).
- 46 “Non dobbiamo immaginare una costanza della ‘natura umana’ che ci consenta di applicare i nostri criteri, la nostra sensibilità, la nostra attitudine percettiva a chi è vissuto cinque o seicento anni fa, se non in termini generalissimi. L’attrezzatura mentale di quei nostri antenati era infatti, almeno sotto alcuni aspetti, molto differente dalla nostra.” Niccoli, *Vedere*, vii.
- 47 For Florence, see Rocke, “Il fanciullo” and Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*. For Venice and the Veneto see Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*.
- 48 Labalme, “Sodomy,” 217.

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4

IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Residence, community, and the sex trade in early modern Bologna

Vanessa McCarthy and Nicholas Terpstra

Early seventeenth-century Bologna was unique for its relatively tolerant legislation on female prostitution. Rome, Florence, and Venice required *meretrici* (prostitutes) and *donne inhoneste* (dishonest women) to inhabit designated areas and streets. Romans settled on the large area of Campo Marzio for their residence, Venetians ordered women to reside in the old medieval civic brothel known as the Castelletto near the city's commercial center, the Rialto, and Florentines designated a few streets located in the poorest areas of each city quarter.¹ Segregation was motivated by concerns about morality as well as the more pragmatic issues of civic disorder, noise, and policing. Containment protected sacred spaces and pious inhabitants from the immorality and disruption of prostitutes and their clients and made it easier for authorities to locate and arrest violators, thereby increasing order as well as the fees and fines collected.² By contrast, Bologna permitted registered prostitutes to live across the city, and the records of its prostitution magistracy demonstrates that they did. The extant annual registers from 1583 to 1630 provide a rare opportunity to map where hundreds of registered prostitutes lived in the city, and to trace individual women's movements. Only about half lived on streets with ten or more prostitutes, and very few dwelt on streets with twenty or more. Consequently, most Bolognese could count prostitutes and dishonest women as near neighbors, and for many laboring-poor, prostitution and prostitutes per se were not a serious problem.³

Regulation and enforcement in Bologna show that secular and religious civic authorities and the general populace approached prostitution primarily as an issue of economics and public order, and only secondarily as an issue of morality and public decorum. Due to the city's economic reliance on university students, civic authorities had long regulated prostitution as a commercial issue and prostitutes as fee- and fine-paying workers governed by a civic magistracy known as the *Ufficio delle Bollette* (Office of Receipts). Established in 1376, the

Bollette registered “Foreigners, Jews, and Whores” (*Forestiere, Hebrei, et Meretrici*). After having tried civic brothels and sumptuary regulations in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and residential zones in 1514 and 1525, Bolognese civic authorities of the later sixteenth century bucked prevailing trends with comparatively relaxed legislation that underscored the connections between prostitutes, Jews, and foreigners as coherent communities living and working in the local body social while remaining legally outside the body politic.⁴ The *Bollette*’s officials and functionaries negotiated between legislation, their own interests, and the needs of individual prostitutes when enforcing regulation. The hundreds of women who registered annually as prostitutes were integrated into local communities through residence and through familial, work, and affective relationships, and had greater opportunities for agency than broader cultural, religious, and social ideals would lead us to expect.

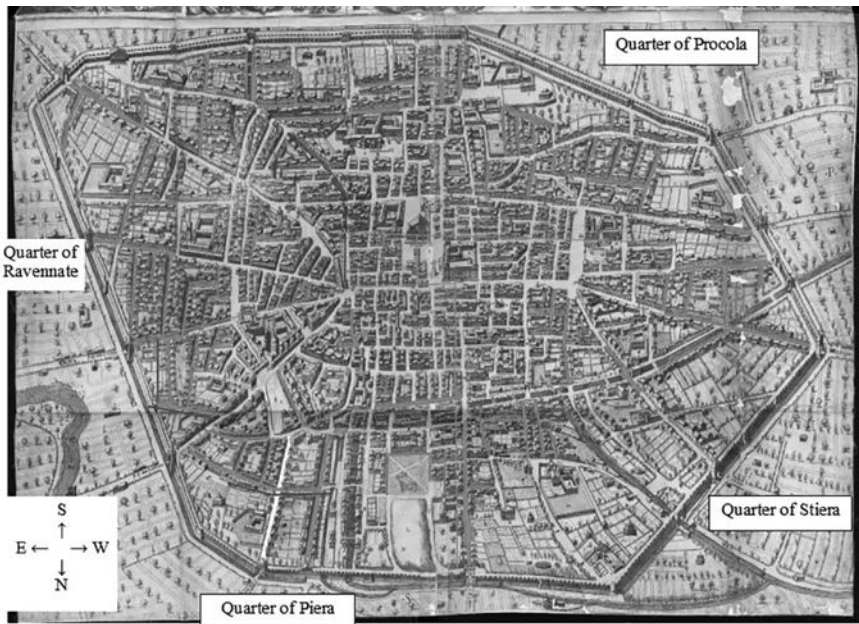
There were bumps on the road to this more relaxed regime. In the late 1560s, the Tridentine reforming Bishop Gabriele Paleotti attempted to separate prostitutes and other dishonest women from most of Bolognese society through residential confinement. Citing the desire “to restrain their wickedness and uncontrolled freedoms of life” and to stop them from polluting others with their “filth,” Paleotti and the papal legate published three decrees that ordered all prostitutes, courtesans, and female procurers to live in a handful of specific city streets. Yet Paleotti was overstepping his jurisdiction. His ambitious reforms failed within eighteen months, and by 1571 the civic government had regained exclusive control over regulation.⁵ It returned to the more tolerant strategy employed before the bishop’s intervention: all prostitutes and dishonest women were required to register and purchase moderately priced licenses from the *Bollette*, but they were neither required to wear distinguishing signs nor to live in assigned streets or areas. They were free to live throughout the city. Scholars of Roman, Venetian, Milanese, and Florentine prostitution have tracked the contrasts between strict legislation and lax prosecution. Prostitutes regularly lived outside of designated streets and areas, sometimes thanks to exemptions sold by the magistrates.⁶ Yet these cities kept their stricter legal regimes on the books. What was distinct about a city that largely abandoned that regime?

This essay examines the residential and social integration of prostitutes in Bologna’s neighborhoods. It first maps their distribution across the city in order to examine how far residential “freedom” extended in practice. While about half of registered prostitutes clustered on sixteen specific streets, the other half lived on eighty-five other streets with ten or fewer other prostitutes. It then reviews registrants’ sometimes complex and contested relationships with family, clients, lovers, friends, and neighbors using evidence recorded in the annual registers and testimonies given to the *Bollette*’s officials. Most were integrated into local networks through the familial, affective, and working relationships they had with other local men and women, and they gave and received support and companionship. Finally, it examines late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century proclamations forbidding prostitutes from residing in specific city streets. These

decrees reflect the civic government's pragmatism: they were issued in response to the specific complaints of powerful convents, churches, and schools located in areas with large prostitute populations. Trial records, cultural sources, and recent scholarship on gossip and visibility shows that most neighbors were aware of what these women did and that they were not troubled by it. What they did find troubling were the displays of wealth by individual women, the noise and disorder that some brought to their neighborhoods, and instances where neighbors lost control over their communities. The *Bollette* provided a vehicle for handling these complaints without criminalizing the prostitutes. Taken together, the residential and legal evidence demonstrates that prostitutes lived in most working-poor neighborhoods of early modern Bologna and that they were largely tolerated as a fact of life.

The geography of early modern Bolognese prostitution

The majority of registered prostitutes lived in the area between the second and third sets of city walls (see Figure 4.1), the “inner suburbs” where the urban poor typically clustered in Italian cities.⁷ Only a handful of prostitutes lived near the city center, usually on short alleys hidden behind larger public



The city quarters are marked by the three longest lines, while the shorter, street-length lines indicate streets on which prostitutes and 'dishonest women' registered in 1604.

FIGURE 4.1 Agostino Carracci, *Bononia docet mater studiorum*, 1581.

buildings that had been licensed for prostitution in earlier centuries.⁸ The civic brothel noted in the 1462 *Bollette* regulations had been immediately south-west of the Piazza Maggiore and civic basilica of San Petronio, and some prostitutes worked by particular gates and markets, but from the sixteenth century Bolognese *meretrici* moved to houses across the low-rent inner suburbs.⁹ Table 4.1 charts the number and percentage of registrants who lived in each quarter in 1584, 1604, and 1624. The quarters differed in size and population as Figure 4.1 shows, and the larger quarters of Porta Procola and Porta Piera housed more prostitutes. Few lived by the north-western city wall in Porta Stiera, which appear on Agostino Carracci's 1581 map (reproduced here) as dominated by fields.¹⁰ The sharp rise and fall in the number of women registering demonstrate the inconsistencies of early modern bureaucracy, with total numbers increasing by 327 from 1584 and 1604 (from 284 to 611) and then plummeting by 466 between 1604 and 1624 (from 611 to 165). Lucia Ferrante has argued that in 1604 the *Bollette* was operating with unusual efficiency, and perhaps even over-zealously.¹¹ The fluctuations tell us more about where the *Bollette* concentrated its work than about where all the prostitutes and dishonest women actually lived.

Charting residence by quarter demonstrates that prostitutes spread themselves fairly evenly throughout the outskirts of the city, and across each quarter. In 1604, registrants lived on at least 102 streets, yet only eight streets had twenty or more women, and only eight were home to ten to nineteen women (see Table 4.2). A few streets housed larger numbers, like Borgo Nuovo di San Felice, in the western quarter of Stiera by the city wall, and Campo di Bovi, located by the eastern city wall in the quarter of Porta Piera.¹² Women also clustered in the ghetto after the Jews were expelled from the Papal States for a final time in 1592.

TABLE 4.1 Residence of registered prostitutes in Bologna's quarters

	1584		1604		1624	
	Number of resident prostitutes	Percent of total registrants	Number of resident prostitutes	Percent of total registrants	Number of resident prostitutes	Percent of total registrants
Porta Piera	41	16.4	179	32	73	47.7
Porta Procola	80	32	175	31.2	44	28.8
Porta Ravennate	69	27.6	76	13.5	10	6.6
Porta Stiera	60	24	131	23.3	26	16.9
Total	250	100	561	100	153	100

*This table includes only those women with identifiable addresses. In 1584, this was 88% of all registrants (250 of 284 total registrants), in 1604 it was 91.8% (561 of 611), and in 1624 it was 92.7% (153 of 165).

Sources: Campione delle Meretrici 1584, 1604, 1624.

TABLE 4.2 Streets with ten or more resident prostitutes in 1604, by quarter

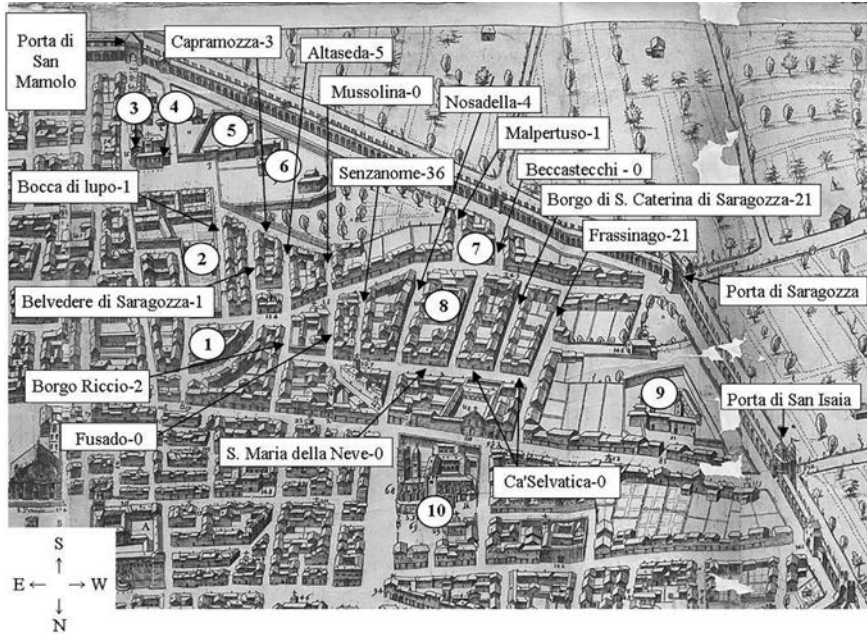
<i>Quarter of Porta Piera</i>	<i>Quarter of Porta Procola</i>	<i>Quarter of Porta Siera</i>	<i>Quarter of Porta Ravenate</i>
Campo di Bovi: 36	Senzanome: 36	Borgo Nuovo di San Felice: 47	Fondazza: 29
Jewish Ghetto: 21	Frassinago: 21	San Felice by the gate: 13	Broccaindosso: 10
Borgo di S. Giacomo: 20	Borgo di Santa Caterina di Saragozza: 21	Avesella: 10	
Torleone: 18	Borgo degli Arienti: 14		
Borgo di San Marino: 17			
Bràina di stra San			
Donato: 13			
Gattamarza: 13			

Source: Campione delle Meretrici 1604.

This was an ironic reversal of the situation in Florence, where the ghetto was deliberately located within the old brothel precinct in 1571.¹³ In 1604, twenty-one women lived in this area.

Most streets in Bologna's inner suburbs numbered only a few prostitutes. In 1604, 84 percent (86 of 102) of the streets on which they registered housed nine or fewer prostitutes, and these women accounted for almost half of all registrants that year (44 percent). Further, 66 percent (68 of the 102 streets) housed five or fewer. Consequently, many of these women lived on streets that were not dominated by prostitutes. A typical example of this is the south-western corner of the city (see Figure 4.2). In 1604, three of the area's streets were heavily populated by prostitutes: Senzanome housed 36, Frassinago housed 21, and Borgo di Santa Caterina di Saragozza housed twenty-one. However, the majority of the neighborhood's streets had five or fewer resident prostitutes and dishonest women: five women lived on Altaseda, four on Nosadella, and three on Capramozza. The surrounding streets of Bocca di lupo, Belvedere di Saragozza, Borgo Riccio, and Malpertuso had two or fewer.

On these streets prostitutes mixed with day-laborers, artisans, and merchants. They rented rooms from pork butchers and shoemakers, lived in inns, and resided next to potters.¹⁴ These were their immediate neighbors, separated only by the porous boundaries of walls, stairways, doorways, and windows where they had frequent day-to-day interactions.¹⁵ Like other working-poor women, they were not confined to the streets that they lived on, but could and did move through the surrounding area buying food, engaging in chores, finding work, visiting friends, and going to the Bollette to buy their licenses.¹⁶ As Elizabeth S. Cohen writes, prostitutes were both "seen and known" in their neighborhoods.



The numbers following the street names represent the number of prostitutes and 'dishonest women' who lived there in 1604.

Churches, religious houses, and colleges:

- 1) Collegio di San Clemente (or di Spagna)
- 2) Convent of Corpus Domini
- 3) Priory of Sant' Antonio
- 4) Collegio Montalto
- 5) Sant' Agostino
- 6) Convent of Sant' Agnese
- 7) Palazzo of the Albergati family
- 8) Convent of Santa Maria degli Angeli
- 9) Convent of San Giovanni Battista
- 10) San Francesco

FIGURE 4.2 Agostino Carracci, *Bononia docet mater studiorum*, 1581.

Networks, neighborhoods, and communities

The *Bollette*'s records reveal prostitutes' affective social and familial circles. Some women were registered as living in their mother's, sister's, and (more rarely) cousin's homes, while other women's female kin, housemates, lovers, and servants bought their licenses. Notaries did not consistently record such details, making quantitative analysis difficult.¹⁷ While men regularly appear in the registers paying for licenses, the specifics of their relationships with the women were almost never recorded. The *Bollette*'s records, particularly testimonies in cases of debt against clients and long-term partners, provide rich information about

women's familial, social, and work relationships. However, the tribunal devoted more effort to investigating unregistered women suspected of prostitution, than to the hundreds of women who had bought licenses.

The Bolognese evidence can be placed in the context of evidence from other northern Italian cities demonstrating how prostitutes were surrounded by family, housemates, and allies. In early seventeenth century Venice, three-quarters of 213 prostitutes noted in a census lived with other people. Most headed their own households, but some were boarders or lived with their mothers. The majority of those who headed households sheltered dependent female kin, children, and a variety of unmarried women, including servants and other prostitutes. A few heads of households (6 percent) lived with men, who were either their intimates or boarders.¹⁸ Roman parish censuses from 1600 to 1621 show similar cohabitation patterns: 47 percent of prostitutes lived with at least one family member, mostly children but also siblings, nieces and nephews, and widowed mothers.¹⁹

Everyone within the household economy benefitted from the income and goods earned by these women. Bologna's registers give examples of sisters as registered prostitutes, like Dorotea di Savi, called "Saltamingroppa" (literally "Jump on my behind") and her sister Benedetta, who lived together with their servant Gentile on Broccaindosso.²⁰ Similarly, Margareta and Francesca Trevisana, both nicknamed "La Solfanella" ("The Matchstick"), lived together on Borgo di Santa Caterina di Saragozza for eight years. While Francesca registered annually from 1598 to 1605, Margareta did so only in 1602, 1604, and 1605.²¹ Before registering, Margareta likely enjoyed the income that her sister earned through prostitution and may have assisted in preparing for and entertaining clients. The *Bollette* suspected that she had, and so launched an investigation against her when she became pregnant in 1601.²²

Mothers and daughters also lived and worked together, like Lucia di Spoloni and her daughter Francesca, who lived on San Mamolo by the old civic brothel area, and Anna Spisana and her mother Lucia, who lived together on Borgo degli Arienti.²³ In 1604, Domenica di Loli bought licenses for her daughters Francesca and Margareta, and all three lived just south of the church and monastery of San Domenico on Borgo degli Arienti. Francesca had lived on the street since at least 1600, and while she was no longer registering in 1609, her sister still was. Margareta continued to live on Borgo degli Arienti until 1614, perhaps with her mother and sister.²⁴

Prostitutes often lived together in rented rooms, small apartments, and inns. Residential clustering was not uncommon for unmarried women, who shared the costs of running a household through lace making, street-peddling, prostitution, and laundering.²⁵ The largest could count as brothels, though there were relatively few of them. In 1583, twenty-one dishonest women lived in the house of Gradello on Bologna's heavily populated Borgo Nuovo di San Felice, by the eastern wall. Yet while registrations climbed in the 1580s, the group at Gradello's shrank to fourteen women in 1584, and eleven in 1588.²⁶ Moreover no other large houses appeared through this period. In 1604, the street with most

registrations was Borgo Nuovo di San Felice, with forty-seven women, and the largest single group was thirteen who gathered in the house of Lucrezia Basilia, while the rest had five or fewer.²⁷ On the second and third most populated streets, Campo di Bovi and Senzanome, no house had more than six registered prostitutes living in it.²⁸

These larger clusters were often inns, where prostitutes benefitted from the presence of other women and the protection of innkeepers. Inns popular with prostitutes included those of Matteo the innkeeper (“osto”) on Frassinago and of Angelo Senso on Pratello. Seven registered women lived at Matteo’s inn in 1589, and ten lived in Angelo’s inn in 1597.²⁹ Few women stayed at inns for more than a year and most registered without surnames, but instead with reference to a town, city, or region, like Flaminia from Ancona (“Anconitana”), Francesca from Fano (“da Fano”), and Ludovica from Modena (“Modenesa”) who lived at Matteo’s place in 1598. These could have been recent migrants or women identifying by parents’ origins or using pseudonyms. The inns and brothels helped them build social networks as they secured places of their own.

Yet, it was more common for women to live with one or two other prostitutes in rented rooms and small apartments. In 1597, Lucia Colieva lived with Elisabetta di Negri on Borgo di San Martino, and the following year she joined another registered prostitute, Vittoria Fiorentina, on Senzanome.³⁰ Similarly, in 1601 Isabella Rosetti, Giulia Bignardina, and Cassandra di Campi all lived together in Isabella’s home on Frassinago. A year later Giulia had died and Cassandra was no longer registered.³¹ For just under ten years, Madonna Ginevra Caretta, who was unregistered, managed a small apartment where six to eight registered prostitutes lived.³² Unlike Bologna’s inns and taverns, Ginevra’s household was mobile, moving across town and back again over the years it operated. In 1588 it was located on Saragozza, in the south-western corner of the city, and the next year it moved to San Colombano in the northwest quarter of Stiera. At least one woman, Lena Fiorentina, followed Ginevra to the new street, where she remained for almost a decade before moving to Paglia.³³ A few of the prostitutes lived with Ginevra for years, like Pelegrina di Tarozzi, who stayed for four years, and Chiara Mantuana, for three.³⁴ Domenica Cavedagna, registered for thirteen years (1597–1609), ran a house on Centotrecento and then on Bràina di stra San Donato.³⁵ Seven other prostitutes lived with her in 1604, and a year later three had left but six new women had moved in. A few stayed with her for four or five years.³⁶

The *Bollette*’s registers explain why some of the women moved out of the homes run by women like Ginevra Caretta and Domenica Cavedagna. Some entered service (either domestic, sexual, or both) while others moved to different streets or left Bologna entirely to try their luck elsewhere.³⁷ While living with other prostitutes could bring economic, professional, and even personal security, it could also bring personal rifts or increased attention from the police (*sbirri*), who saw these homes as easy targets for making arrests.

Men interacted with registered prostitutes as occasional clients, long-term *amici*, absentee husbands, jealous lovers, and as acquaintances, if not friends.

Single women, whether unmarried or widowed, were financially and socially vulnerable, subject to sexual slander, to charges of magic and sorcery, and to general suspicion by neighbors and authorities alike.³⁸ Relationships with men afforded them a degree of protection from the financial and social marginalization they experienced because of their gender, economic status, and work, and so women turned to them not just for income and companionship but also for a measure of protection.

The civic government had always prohibited married women from prostituting themselves, since by doing so they committed adultery. The 1462 statutes ordered whipping and expulsion for the women, and fines of 100 lire for officials who looked the other way.³⁹ Women living with husbands could not register with the *Bollette*, though abandoned wives sometimes could. Francesca di Galiani claimed in 1604 that her husband Bartolomeo di Grandi went to war three or four years previously, leaving her with a three-year-old daughter to feed. She had since given birth to a daughter with a cloth worker Giovanni, with whom she had been living for about a year “to make the expenses.”⁴⁰

For the *Bollette*, the question of whether abandoned women like Francesca could and should register was a practical one since women who registered were women who paid fees. These women appealed to the sympathy of *Bollette* officials by claiming that they were married but had not seen their husbands in many years, leaving unanswered the question of whether their husbands were alive or dead. This ambiguity about the ultimate fate of their husbands would have freed them from charges of adultery at the archbishop’s tribunal (if the husband was alive) while at the same time freeing them from registration with the *Bollette* (if he were dead). Francesca did not state whether she thought her husband was dead or alive, and ultimately a kinsman Vincenzo Dainesi swore that he would ensure she left her “wicked life” (“mala vita”) and take her into his home to live with him and his wife.⁴¹ The officials were satisfied with this, and so Francesca remained unfined and unregistered.

In 1586, Vice Legate Domenico Toschi authorized police to seize “all married women who do not live with their husbands” caught at night in bed with their lovers (*amatiis*).⁴² Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti believed such women were clearly committing adultery, and Pope Sixtus V’s bull *Ad compascendum* (1586) ordered that any married person whose spouse was alive and had sex with another person—even if they had a separation from an ecclesiastical court—should be sentenced to death.⁴³ Toschi’s decree was reconfirmed ten years later by the new vice legate, Annibale Rucellai, and a third time in 1614.⁴⁴ If a woman returned to her husband, she was to be immediately deregistered and could not be allowed to practice prostitution. If she continued, she was no longer under the *Bollette*’s jurisdiction, but rather that of the archbishop.

Stable relationships with men, referred to in Bologna as *amici*, “lovers,” or as *amici fermi*, “firm friends,” offered a measure of economic security for prostitutes by providing money, clothing, and food in varying amounts depending on the men’s own status.⁴⁵ When Arsilia Zanetti sued Andrea di Pasulini, notary of the

archbishop's tribunal, for compensation for their three-year sexual relationship ("amicitia carnale"), she noted he had given her three pairs of shoes, a pair of low-heeled dress slippers, and a few coins (a *ducatone*, half a *scudo*, and a *piastra*, a Spanish coin).⁴⁶ Buying the woman's licenses could also be part of the arrangement, as Pasulini had also done for Arsilia.⁴⁷ Even though Bologna's monthly rate of five soldi, and annual rate of three lire, was extraordinarily low—only one-fifth of what Florentine prostitutes paid—this was another expense that women did not have to worry about and suggested commitment on the part of the men.⁴⁸

Lovers and friends helped women in their interactions with the law. The cavalier Aloisio di Rossi had a three-year sexual relationship with Pantaselia Donina, alias di Salani, and when her landlord complained to the *Bollette* that she had not paid the rent, di Rossi acted as her procurator and ultimately paid the landlord.⁴⁹ Other prostitutes maintained relationships with local, low-level arresting officers (*sbirri*); Elizabeth S. Cohen has uncovered many relationships between prostitutes and such men, noting that "the two disparaged professions often struck up alliances in which the women traded sex, companionship, and information for protection and money."⁵⁰ Such partnerships were not unusual in Bologna. In May 1583, the *sbirro* Pompilio registered Francesca Fiorentina as his "woman" ("femina") and got her a six-month license for free.⁵¹ In 1624 three women registered as living in the "casa" of the *Bollette*'s *esecutore*, Pietro Benazzi, on Borgo di San Martino.⁵² Pietro registered Caterina Furlana on January 11, 1624 and paid for her one-month license. She was subsequently de-registered because "she went to stay in order to serve Pietro Benazzi." When Caterina di Rossi moved out of her place on Borgo degli Arienti and into Pietro's house, she paid for one month and never again.⁵³ Though these *Bollette* functionaries could not keep these women's names out of the registers, they could keep them from paying for licenses, even when they were most likely still living by prostitution, and may have protected them from harassment by other court officials.

Male friends could also be rallied for support, particularly by women who had lived in one street or area for a substantial period of time, building reputations and financial and social ties with their neighbors. When Margareta Trevisana "The Matchstick" (Solfanella) was investigated by the *Bollette* in 1601, she had been living on Borgo di Santa Caterina di Strada Maggiore with her sister for at least eight years. She confessed that three years earlier she had given birth to the child of Messer Antonio Simio, a married man.⁵⁴ The *Bollette* had investigated her then, allowing her to remain unregistered on the promise that she would reform her life and go to live with an honorable woman. In 1601 she was pregnant with the child of another man and was living with her sister Francesca, a registered prostitute.⁵⁵

Margareta produced statements signed by two male neighbors who described her as a good woman ("donna de bene") the whole time they had known her, while her parish curate confirmed that she had confessed and taken communion the previous Easter.⁵⁶ On further questioning by the *Bollette*, the priest claimed that he had known Margareta for about ten or twelve years, having first met her

when he lived in the same house as she and her sister. He claimed not to know what kind of life Margareta led, but admitted that she appeared pregnant, and was, as far as he knew, not married. The priest's testimony cleared her of charges of adultery, but could not save her from registration, a three-lire fine, and probation.⁵⁷ In May 1602, Margareta produced statements about her "honest life and reputation" provided by two different neighbors and another curate at Santa Caterina di Saragozza, and her name was removed from the register.⁵⁸

Margareta lived on the same street for ten or twelve years, had relationships with neighbors and housemates, had a sister with whom she lived, and was able to rally four male neighbors and two parish priests to support her. She and others moved amongst family, friends, long-term lovers, and occasional clients, building relationships on reciprocal, if uneven, bonds of financial, emotional, and legal support and protection. They were not just physically a part of Bologna's working-poor neighborhoods, but also socially and affectively integrated into their communities.

Bad neighbors

While Bolognese civic law tolerated prostitution and permitted prostitutes to reside throughout the city, public disorder was always a concern. Decrees published by the Bolognese legate, at the request of convents, churches, confraternities, and schools, frequently lamented the dishonest words and daily and nightly reveling by prostitutes and other disreputable people.⁵⁹ Men socialized in prostitutes' homes, eating, making music, and talking.⁶⁰ While some parties remained relatively quiet, others filled the neighborhood with wine-fueled singing, laughing, and the sounds of dancing and of fights over games of chance. The noise was intrusive, disruptive, and alarming: blasphemous words, violent acts, and sexual slander carried through windows, over walls, and into streets, squares, and other residences. Broadsheets illustrating prostitutes' life-cycles usually included knife fights by men who discovered that "their" woman had another lover.⁶¹ Barking dogs, brawling men, and screaming women heard through flimsy walls and open windows added to the noise of crowded squares, laneways, and streets.⁶² Men also fought in doorways and on streets in full sight and hearing of neighbors.

To reduce these disturbances, Papal Legate Benedetto Giustiniani forbade prostitutes from throwing parties (*festini*) or "making merry" (*trebbi*) in the homes of honest people, or even from eating or drinking in taverns and inns. Other decrees forbade games of chance and betting, like dice and cards.⁶³ Law-makers recognized that it was less the prostitutes than the men with them who were the problem. In 1602 prostitutes were forbidden from travelling through the city at night with more than three men, under fine of 100 scudi for the men and whipping for the women.⁶⁴ Eight years later, Legate Giustiniani forbade prostitutes from going through the city at night with *any* men, under penalty of whipping for both the men and the prostitutes.⁶⁵

Enclosed communities of male and female religious frequently complained about the noise of prostitution. Bolognese authorities attempted general exclusionary zones around convents in the 1560s without success and so moved to proclamations expelling prostitutes and other disreputable people from specific streets; this was similar to Florence, where the streets designated for prostitution were de facto exclusionary zones around most convents.⁶⁶ Between 1571 and 1630, at least fifty proclamations cleared twenty-five distinct streets in Bologna, about one-quarter of all the streets inhabited by prostitutes in 1604. Most proclamations concerned eight specific convents on the city's outskirts, though a few male enclosures were also protected.⁶⁷ All either had elite connections or were newly built, and most were near streets heavily populated by prostitutes.

In 1603 Vice Legate Marsilio Landriani forbade all prostitutes, procurers, and other dishonest women from living on a cluster of streets bordering the Poor Clares' house of Corpus Domini, established in 1456 by S. Caterina de' Vigri, and the Dominican convent of Sant'Agnese (est. 1223), one of the city's richest and most prestigious convents with over 100 nuns.⁶⁸ Landriani's proclamation stated that the nuns were greatly disturbed and scandalized by the daily and nightly reveling of prostitutes, procurers, and other disreputable people, the "dishonest" words that they spoke, and the wicked examples they posed.⁶⁹ Prostitutes had just over a month to move out, and those found there after the deadline would be publicly whipped, while their landlords would be fined fifty gold scudi and lose their outstanding rents.⁷⁰ Yet few prostitutes were actually registered on these streets.⁷¹ While registrations generally dropped dramatically in the 1610s and 1620s, these streets declined the most, with only two prostitutes remaining by 1614.⁷² In 1622, the expulsion was repeated almost verbatim with the addition of two neighboring streets that housed a handful of prostitutes; none remained by 1624.⁷³

Concerns about pollution continued, particularly around shrines. The confraternal shrine of the Madonna della Neve was built in 1479 to shelter a miraculous image of the Virgin on the street Senzanome at the south-western corner of the city.⁷⁴ Senzanome had twenty-three registered prostitutes in 1594, thirty-six in 1604, and thirty-five in 1609. Yelling, singing, mocking, and jesting disturbed the peace, interrupted the Mass and other divine offices, and forced young, unmarried girls and respectable residents to hide in their houses. Confraternal brothers repeatedly complained to the legate about the noise of Senzanome's prostitutes and other "people who have little fear of God and his most holy mother."⁷⁵ Between 1587 and 1621 four proclamations expelled dishonest people and prostitutes from Senzanome and around Santa Maria della Neve.⁷⁶ One of 1608 threatened women caught residing or lingering in the street with a fine of ten scudi the first time, and expulsion the second time.⁷⁷ Men could be fined ten scudi the first time, and another ten scudi and three lashes the second time. This proclamation even named three specific women, Giulia da Gesso, Doralice Moroni, and Ludovica Giudi, "as well as every other *meretrice*."⁷⁸ A year later all three of these women were still living on Senzanome, with Doralice Moroni registered

in the house of the priest Campanino and Giulia da Gesso in the house of a priest of San Niccolo.⁷⁹ Moreover, they shared the street with thirty-five other registered prostitutes. Yet the prostitutes gradually did move away, and in 1614 and 1624, only two women registered on Senzanome.⁸⁰ The Legate's 1621 decree ordered dishonorable people living on Senzanome to move to Frassinago, to Borgo Novo, or to "another street appointed to similar people" where there were no convents, churches, or oratories.⁸¹

Neighbors had direct, day-to-day contact with prostitutes and knew details about their lives. Gossip—the sharing of local and extra local information—typified neighborhoods and formed the basis of community self-regulation.⁸² People constantly watched and listened to their neighbors from the streets, in doorways, through windows, on balconies, and through flimsy walls.⁸³ Early modern prostitution was public and visible. Michel de Montaigne remarked that prostitutes sat at their widows and leaned out of them, while others observed that the women promenaded proudly through the streets.⁸⁴ In his *Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo* (1616), Tommaso Garzoni described how prostitutes worked to catch men's eyes while sitting at their widows, gesturing and bantering with them.⁸⁵ Some called attention to themselves by wearing brightly colored gowns with ostentatious decorations and jewels on their fingers and at their necks.⁸⁶ Contemporary Italian broadsheets depict women sitting at their widows and in their doorways while older women act as go-betweens.⁸⁷

Bollette testimonies show that Bolognese knew a great deal about the prostitutes who were their neighbors. Witnesses often claimed that they had seen women going through the streets or into buildings and apartments with men. In 1601, Caterina Marema told that when she lived in the same *casa* as Lucrezia Buonacasa, she frequently saw the tailor Gian Domenico Sesto come to stay and sleep with her.⁸⁸ Others saw more intimate behavior, like Bartolomea, daughter of Antonio di Miani, who claimed that she knew her neighbors Margareta and Cornelia were "meretrici" because she saw them laughing, dancing, embracing, and kissing men. She also heard that they went to register with the *Bollette*.⁸⁹ Still others testified more simply that "everyone in the neighborhood considers her to be a whore," or, "everyone says that she is his whore." Finally, some men talked with each other about their sexual relationships with women. Silvio, son of Rodrigo di Manedini, claimed that over the previous three years his friend Tarquino, a *shirro*, told him repeatedly that he was "screwing" (*chiavava*) Lucrezia Buonacasa.⁹⁰ In this case, Silvio claimed also to have first-hand knowledge of their relationship: he said that he had seen the two in bed together at Lucrezia's house on via Paradiso and at the watch house of the *shirri*. In a close knit, intensely local world like this, prostitutes and dishonest women would have been hard-pressed to keep their relationships and work a secret.

In pragmatic terms, some women may not have wanted to keep their work a secret: gossip and visibility acted as advertisement and could attract better clients. Local knowledge of women's attachments to men might also earn them a measure of respect, even if only while the relationship continued, especially if

the man was honored locally because of his wealth or status. These relationships could bring a sort of social protection.

Whether or not women or their clients and lovers made spectacles of themselves, prostitution was both seen and known. Most working-poor people were not overly scandalized by the fact that their neighbors lived by prostitution, or perhaps they had resigned themselves to living amongst them. No evidence has come to light that working-poor women and men made a concerted effort to drive prostitutes and dishonest women as a group out of their neighborhoods. Most streets on which registered prostitutes lived housed ten or fewer such women, and prostitutes may have been quieter and less given to overt public display, since they did not have to compete with each other for the attention of the men and youths who came in search of their services. With fewer women there was less of the serenading, violence, and harassment by rowdy students and drunken men that offended neighbors, and less attention from patrolling officers looking to fill their purses with rewards for arrests.⁹¹ Tessa Storey has argued that as long as Roman prostitutes maintained local order and the appearance of respectability, neighbors did not see them as an exceptional problem. A few written complaints requesting the eviction of specific prostitutes from their streets identified only the most scandalous and the loudest, on grounds that they posed bad examples by “touching men’s shameful parts and doing other extremely dishonest acts” in the streets.⁹² Those who were well behaved—and these were actually listed by name—were welcome to stay provided that they continued to behave.

Working-poor neighbors who found the women’s work immoral or offensive or their noise and disorder overwhelming could move to one of the 100 or so other city streets that were not heavily populated by prostitutes. Even in 1604, the year when the highest number of prostitutes and dishonest women registered with the *Bollette*, only sixteen streets had ten or more registrants living on them, and only eight had more than twenty. At least half of all Bolognese prostitutes were more widely dispersed through the city, and this may explain why we see no concerted efforts to dispel them as a group. Beyond this, it became increasingly difficult to successfully prosecute violations like adultery or the lack of license. A 1586 order from the vice legate to the *Bollette*’s officials suggested that small-scale rivalries were behind too many frivolous denunciations. Henceforth, unless a woman was found *in flagrante* with a man, the testimonies of two neighbors of good repute and the local parish priest would be required in order to find her guilty.⁹³

Conclusion

For many working-poor Bolognese men and women, living amongst prostitutes was a fact of life. Whether they respected these neighbors or not, they learned to live with them. Prostitutes and dishonest women had their places in the local kinship, social, and economic networks of their neighborhoods

and the larger city. This is not to say that they were not mocked, or that those who treated them with courtesy fully respected them. Yet while some prostitutes annoyed, overwhelmed, and frightened some neighbors with their noise, scandal, and violence, they were also the sisters, mothers, lovers, and friends of many others.

Elizabeth S. Cohen has argued that “[prostitute’s] presence corresponded to an intricate engagement in the social networks of daily life. In practice, if not in theory, the prostitutes occupied an ambiguous centrality.”⁹⁴ Tessa Storey suggests that restrictive legislation, especially residential confinement, elicited sympathy from Romans, who were not overly concerned about the immorality of prostitution.⁹⁵ This was also true in Bologna, where prostitutes were far more widely distributed across the entire city. Religious authorities like Gabriele Paleotti found them immoral and disruptive, posing bad examples and needing to be separated and marginalized. Yet civic authorities and most lay people appear to have held more nuanced attitudes, engaging prostitutes in the body social and using bureaucratic registration to mediate their place in the body politic. The sources generated by the *Ufficio delle Bollette* in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries reveal these women operating within networks of sociability, work, and family. They demonstrate women who fit within their communities, more uneasily at sometimes than others, and who both gave and received the resources of support, companionship, and security that characterized the community-centered world of early modern Italy.

Notes

- 1 Cohen, “Seen and Known,” 402. Hacke, *Women, Sex, and Marriage*, 179. Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà,” 291–92 and 296. Terpstra, “Locating the Sex Trade,” 108–24.
- 2 Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà,” 290–91 and 295; Cohen, “Seen and Known,” 404–05; Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 70–94; Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 48–49.
- 3 For expanded analysis and archival documentation, see: McCarthy, “Prostitution.”
- 4 Biblioteca Universitaria Bologna (hereafter BUB), ms. 373, n. 3C, 151v–152v. Terpstra, *Cultures of Charity*, 205–06, 329. McCarthy, “Prostitution, Community, and Civic Regulation,” 40, 54–61.
- 5 Archivio di Stato di Bologna (hereafter ASB), *Boschi*, b. 541, fol. 170v, “Bando sopra le meretrici et riforma de gli altri bandi sopra a cio fatti” (January 31 and February 1, 1568). For more on this episode and the gendered politics of social welfare reform in sixteenth-century Bologna: Terpstra, *Cultures of Charity*, 19–54, 206–07. For the comparatively loose regime in the Convertite: Monson, *Habitual Offenders*.
- 6 Cohen, “Seen and Known,” 403 and 405–08; Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 49; Brackett, “The Florentine Onestà,” 292. Terpstra, “Locating the Sex Trade,” 116–21.
- 7 Miller, *Renaissance Bologna*, 16–17. Terpstra, “Sex and the Sacred.”
- 8 For example, Isotta Boninsegna and Giovanna di Martini. In 1604 Polonia, daughter or widow of Domenico Galina of Modena lived on Simia, while in 1614 Maria Roversi did, and in 1630 Domenica Borgonzona lived there. ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Campione delle Meretrici (hereafter C de M) 1584, [np] “I” and “G” sections; 1604, [np] “P” section; 1614, 190; 1630, [np] “D” section.
- 9 This street was called variously the “via stufa della Scimmia,” the “postribolo,” or “lupanare Nuovo,” as well as the Corte dei Bulgari. Fanti, *Le vie*, vol. 2, 516–17. McCarthy, “Prostitution,” 20–67.

- 10 Biblioteca Comunale di Bologna (hereafter BCB), *Gabinetto disegni e stampe*, “Raccolta piante e vedute della città di Bologna,” port. 1, n. 14. <http://badigit.comune.bologna.it/mappe/14/library.html>
- 11 Ferrante, “Pro mercede carnale,” 48.
- 12 Borgo Nuovo di San Felice was one of the streets that Bishop Gabriele Paleotti had ordered prostitutes to live in. ASB, Boschi, b. 541, fols. 170r–171v, “Bando sopra le meretrici” (January 31 and February 1, 1568). Zanti, *Nomi*, 16.
- 13 Muzzarelli, “Ebrei a Bologna,” 862–70.
- 14 Francesca Ballerina rented from Giacomo the pork butcher (*lardarolo*) on Frassinago. Giacoma di Ferrari da Reggio, Ursina de Bertini, and Lucrezia di Grandi all lived in the house of Giovanni Pietro the shoemaker (*calzolario*) on Senzanome. Lucia Tagliarini lived on Frassinago in the inn of Zanino. Giovanna Querzola, alias Stuarola, lived on Nosadella between the potter (*pignataro*) and the shoemaker (*calzolaro*). C de M 1604, [np] “F”, “I”, “V”, “L”, “T”, and “G” sections, respectively.
- 15 Cohen and Cohen, “Open and Shut,” especially 64 and 68–69.
- 16 Chojnacka, *Working Women*; Cohen, “To Pray.”
- 17 For instance, in 1604, 611 women registered and only eleven mothers and four sisters were recorded as purchasing licenses for their kin. McCarthy, “Prostitution,” 220–21.
- 18 Of the 213 prostitutes who appeared in the censuses, one-third had children. Chojnacka, *Working Women*, 22–24.
- 19 Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 128–29. On widowed mothers, 114.
- 20 Benedetta was listed as “sorella di Saltamingroppa.” C de M 1604, [np] “B” and “D” sections.
- 21 C de M 1605, 175. For Francesca, see C de M 1598, 56; 1599, 49; 1600, 68; 1601, 60; 1602, 72; 1603, 72; 1604, [np] “F” section; 1605, 86. For Margareta, see C de M 1602, 201; 1604, [np] “F” section; 1605, 175. In 1605, Margareta was deregistered when she began working as a wet nurse for the Ercolani, a senatorial family. As the register reads: “Sta per balia del 40 Hercolani.”
- 22 C de M 1601, 140. ASB, *Uffizio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Inventionum 1601, [np] fol. 19v (June 28, 1601).
- 23 C de M 1584, [np] “L” section. Both were registered under Lucia’s name. C de M 1624, [np] “A” and “L” sections.
- 24 C de M 1600, 73; 1604, [np] “F” and “M” sections; 1609, 171; 1614, 172. Domenica was not registered.
- 25 Hufton, “Women without Men.” Chojnacka, *Working Women*, 18–19. Cohen, “Seen and Known,” 406.
- 26 C de M 1584 and 1588.
- 27 Of those who registered, almost all gave their street and residence (44 of 47). For names of co-habitants: McCarthy, “Prostitution, Community, and Civic Regulation,” 224–25.
- 28 A total of twenty-seven (75 percent) of the thirty-six women who lived on Campo di Bovi identified their homes: five lived in the “casa” of Messer Filippo Scranaro, and the rest lived with two or fewer other prostitutes. A total of thirty (87 percent) of the thirty-five women who registered on Senzanome identified their homes: six lived in the “casa” of Giulia di Sarti, called l’Orba (the Blind), who was not registered, and four lived in the “casa” of Giovanni Pietro the shoemaker. Otherwise, all the rest lived with two or fewer other prostitutes. C de M 1604.
- 29 C de M 1589 and 1597.
- 30 C de M 1597, 61 and 86 respectively; C de M 1598, 95 and 142 respectively.
- 31 C de M 1601, 99, 78, and 176 respectively.
- 32 This was between 1588 and 1597. Ginevra registered once, in January 1588, when she paid for a one-month license. C de M 1588, [np] “G” section. In 1588, six registered prostitutes lived with her, in 1589 seven did, and in 1594 and 1597 eight did. C de M 1588; 1589; 1594; 1597.
- 33 C de M 1589, [np] “L” section; 1594, [np] “L” section. C de M 1599, 28. Ginevra was still there in 1601, when Margareta Tinarolla lived in her home. See C de M 1601, 130.

- 34 C de M 1594, [np] "P" section; 1597, [np] "P" section. C de M 1597, [np] "C" section; C de M 1599, 28.
- 35 For her first registration, see C de M 1597, [np] "D" section.
- 36 Eg., Gentile di Sarti, C de M 1601, 79; 1605, 100, and Domenica Fiorea, C de M 1604, [np] "E" section; 1609, 66–67.
- 37 Lucia Fiorentina left Ginevra's to serve in the house of a local scholar ("Signor Dottore"). C de M 1589, [np] "L" section. Diana di Sacchi Romana lived in Ginevra's *casa* in January 1594, but moved twice more that year, to Borgo Polese and then to Altaseda. C de M 1594, [np] "D" section. C de M 1594, [np] "L" section, Lucia Fiorentina. It is unclear but possible that this was the same Lucia who entered service in 1589.
- 38 Chojnacka, "Early Modern Venice," especially 217 and 225. McCarthy, "Prostitution," 253–314.
- 39 See ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette e Presentazioni dei Forestieri*, Scritture Diverse, busta 1, "Statuti," [np] fol. 8r.
- 40 ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Filza 1604, [np] "Die 21 May 1604," fol. 1r.
- 41 Vincenzo is described as Francesca's "cognatus." Ibid., fol. 1r–v.
- 42 This permission was copied into the 1586 register and the 1462 illuminated statutes: C de M 1586, [np] "Z" section (28 June 1586); ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette e Presentazioni dei Forestieri*, Statuti, sec. XV, codici miniati, ms. 64, 28.
- 43 For Paleotti's reaction, see BUB, ms. 89, fasc. 2, *Constitutiones concilii provincialis Bonon. 1586*, fol. 95v, cited in Ferrante, "La sessualità," 993.
- 44 ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Filza 1601, [np] "Decreto d[el]le bolette" (November 20, 1596); Filza 1614, [np] "Dalla letura delli statuti si cava che le Donne di vita inhonesta si possono descrivere nel campione in 4 modi" (undated).
- 45 John Florio defines "amico" as "a friend, also a lover." Florio, *Queen Anna's*, 24. See also Cohen, "Camilla la Magra."
- 46 The suit was brought to the Bollette. ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Filza 1601, [np] "Arsilia Zanetti" (November 12, 1601). For a detailed study of Bolognese registered prostitutes who took clients to the Bollette's tribunal for debt, see Ferrante, "Pro mercede carnale."
- 47 Pasulini bought her two six-month licenses in July 1598 and January 1601. Arsilia's son, Giovanni Battista, paid for the other months. C de M 1598, 48; 1599, 3; 1600, 4; 1601, 4.
- 48 Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter ASF), Onestà, ms 1, ff. 27r–31v. Terpstra, "Sex and the Sacred," 77.
- 49 Ludovico Pizzoli, the Bollette's *esecutore*, claimed that for three years Rossi had purchased her licenses because he was having a continuous sexual relationship with her even while she was having sex with other men: ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Filza 1606, "Cont[ra] Pantaselia Donina[m] al[ia]s de Salanis" (August 19, 1605), fol. 1r. John Florio defines "amicitia" as "amity, freindship [sic], good will." Florio, *Queen Anna's*, 24. The Bollette's 1602 register confirms that Rossi paid for her licenses in person as well as giving money to Pizzoli to pay on his behalf. C de M 1601, 160; 1602, 154; 1603, 170. ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Filza 1601, "Molto Ill[ust]re et Ecc[ellen]te Sig[no]re" (May 14, 1601).
- 50 Cohen, "Balk Talk," 101.
- 51 The record in the register does not say why it was given for free, only that Pomilio "solvet nihil." C de M 1583, [np] "F" section.
- 52 These were Angelica Bellini, Caterina Furlana, and Caterina di Rossi. C de M, 1624, [np] "A" and "C" sections.
- 53 Both in Ibid., [np] "C" section.
- 54 This was according to the curate of her parish church. ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Inventionum 1601, [np] fols. 20v–21v (June 20, 1601; July 2, 1601). For her sister Francesca's registrations: C de M 1598, 56; 1599, 49; 1600, 68; 1601, 60.
- 55 ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Inventionum 1601, [np] fol. 19v (June 28, 1601) and fol. 20r–v (June 30, 1601).

- 56 ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Filza 1601, [np] “Malg[are]ta Sulfanela” (June 27, 1601).
- 57 ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Inventionum 1601, [np] fols. 20v–21v (July 2, 1601).
- 58 ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Filza 1603, [np] (26 June 1602). C de M 1602, 21. The Convertite confirmed this removal: ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Filza 1603, [np] untitled (October 12, 1602).
- 59 See, for instance, BCB, *Bandi Merlani*, V, fol. 106r, untitled, begins “Non essendo conveniente che presso li Monasteri j di Monache” (March 24, 1603). McCarthy, “Prostitution,” 131–97.
- 60 Cohen, “Courtesans,” 202.
- 61 “Vita et fine miserabile delle meretrici” (“Life and Miserable End of Prostitutes”), ca. 1600, in Kunzle, *History of the Comic Strip*, 275. Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, “La vita infelice della meretrice compartita ne dodeci mesi dell’anno lunario che non falla dato in luce da Veridico astrologo” (1692), Museo della Città di Bologna, 2470 (re 1/425).
- 62 Cohen, “Honor and Gender,” especially 600–01. Terpstra, “Sex and the Sacred,” 71, 79–80.
- 63 ASB, *Assunteria di Sanità*, Bandi (XVI–1792), Bandi Bolognesi sopra la peste, 45, “Bandi Generali del Ill[ustrissimo] et Reverendiss[i]mo Monsignor Fabio Mirto Arcivescovo di Nazarette Governatore di Bologna,” (February 17, 18, and 19, 1575), fol. 2v; BCB, *Bandi Merlani*, V, fol. 64r, “Bando Sopr’al gioco, & Biscazze, alli balli nell’Hosterie, & che le Donne meretrici non vadano vestite da huomo” (December 9, 1602).
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (hereafter Fisher), B-11 04425, “Bando generale dell’Illustrissimo, & Reverendissimo Sig. Benedetto Card. Giustiniano Legato di Bologna” (June 23 and 24, 1610), “Delle Meretrici. Ca XXVIII,” 60–61.
- 66 In 1565, Governor Francesco de’Grassi set the exclusionary zone at 30 pertiche (approximately 114 meters), while in 1566 Francesco Bossi extended the zone to 50 pertiche (190 meters). See Martini, *Manuale di metrologia*, 92. ASB, *Legato*, Bandi speciali, vol. 3, fol. 16r (February 1, 1565); ASB, *Boschi*, b. 541 (February 1 and 8, 1566), fol. 115r. Florence reduced its exclusionary zone from 175 to 60 meters in this time (i.e., from 300 braccia to 100): ASF, Acquisti e Doni 291, “Onestà e Meretrici” (May 6, 1561). Terpstra, “Sex and the Sacred,” 78–79.
- 67 These convents were San Bernardino, Santa Caterina in Strada Maggiore, San Guglielmo, San Leonardo, San Ludovico, Santa Cristina, San Bernardo, Corpus Domini, and Sant’Agnese. Proclamations also protected the new monastery of San Giorgio, the Benedictine monastery of San Procolo, the college of the Hungarians, the Jesuits and their school, the new church of Santa Maria Mascarella, and the shrine of the Madonna della Neve. McCarthy, “Prostitution,” 131–97.
- 68 Zarri, “I monasteri femminili,” 166, 177. Johnson, *Monastic Women*, 235–37. Fini, *Bologna sacra*, 14.
- 69 BCB, *Bandi Merlani*, V, fol. 106r, untitled, begins “Non essendo conveniente che presso li Monasterij di Monache” (March 24, 1603).
- 70 One-third of each fine was to go to the accuser, one-third to the city treasury, and one-third to the *esecutore*.
- 71 In 1601, one woman registered on Bocca di lupo, two on Capramozza, and four on Belvedere di Saragozza. In 1604, one registered on Bocca di lupo, three on Capramozza, and one on Belvedere di Saragozza. C de M 1601 and 1604. One of the women who lived on Belvedere in 1601 continued to do so in 1604, while another had moved three blocks west to Senzanome, and a third had moved across town to Campo di Bovi by the north-eastern wall. These were Vittoria Pellizani, Gentile di Parigi, and Angela Amadesi, called “La Zoppina.” For Vittoria: C de M 1601, 204 and 1604, [np] “V” section. For Gentile: C de M 1601, 74 and 1604, [np] “G” section. For Angela: C de M 1601, 136 and 1604, [np] “A” section.
- 72 These were Camilla di Fiorentini, who lived in the house of Caterina the widow, and Cecilia Baliera. C de M 1614, 288 and 39 respectively.

- 73 See BCB, *Bandi Merlani*, XI, fol. 28r, untitled, begins “Non essendo conveniente, che appresso li Monasterij di Monache” (January 18, 1622). In 1624, four women lived on Altaseta and none on Mussolina.
- 74 Guidicini, *Cose notabili*, vol. III, 179–80 and volume III, 346–50.
- 75 The proclamation clearly states that the order was made at the insistence of the “Huomini della Madonna dalla Neve, Confraternità di essa, e persone honeste di detta strada.” BCB, *Bandi Merlani*, X, fol. 128r (August 20, 1621).
- 76 These were published in 1587, 1602, 1608, and 1621. BCB, *Bandi Merlani*, I, fol. 449r, untitled, begins “Devieto di affitare a persone disoneste nella contrada di S. Maria della Neve” (April 26, 1587); ASB, *Legato*, Bandi speciali, vol. 15, fol. 198r, untitled, begins “Essendo la Contrada di Santa Maria dalla Neve sempre stata Contrada quieta” (January 31, 1602); ASB, *Legato*, Bandi speciali, vol. 17, fol. 225r, untitled, begins “Havendo l’Illustriss[im]e Reverendiss[ime] Sig[nor] Car[dinal] di Bologna pien notitia” (June 6, 1608); BCB, *Bandi Merlani*, X, fol. 128r, “Bando Contra le Meretrice, & Persone inhoneste” (August 20, 1621).
- 77 “non possa, ne possano, ne debbano sotto qual si vogli pretesto, a quesito colore fermarsi, o star ferme per detta strada, sotto il portico, suso il lor’uscio, o d’altri, o suso l’uscio dell’Hostarie.” ASB, *Legato*, Bandi speciali, vol. 17, fol. 225r (June 6, 1608).
- 78 “comanda espressamente all GIULIA da Gesso, all DORALICE Moroni, alla LUDOVICA Guidi, & ad ogn’altra MERETRICE [sic].” ASB, *Legato*, Bandi speciali, vol. 17, fol. 225r (June 6, 1608).
- 79 C de M 1609, 73, 121, and 151, respectively.
- 80 These were Agata Martelli, alias Bagni, from Castel San Pietro and Lena di Stefani who lived in the casa of Messer Domenico Bonhuomo. C de M 1614, 19 and 1624, [np] “L” section.
- 81 BCB, *Bandi Merlani*, X, fol. 128r, “Bando Contra le Meretrice, & Persone inhoneste” (August 20, 1621). Though Savelli did not specify which “Borgo Nuovo” they should move to, in all likelihood he meant Borgo Nuovo di stra Maggiore, which had no convents or churches on it.
- 82 Cohen and Cohen, “Open and Shut,” 67–68.
- 83 Cowan, “Gossip,” 314–16; Cohen and Cohen, “Open and Shut,” 68–69.
- 84 Cohen, “Courtesans,” 204–05; Cohen, “Seen and Known,” 396–97. In a later article Cohen argues that “[t]hrough typically noisier and more abrasive than feminine ideals would dictate, much of prostitutes’ street behavior was not radically distinct; rather it fell toward one end on a spectrum of working class practices.” Cohen, “To Pray,” 310.
- 85 Tommaso Garzoni, *Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo, nuovamente ristampata & posta in luce, da Thomaso Garzoni da Bagnacavallo* (Venice: Appresso l’Herede di Gio. Battista Somasco, 1593), 598. Available online from the Università degli Studi di Torino OPAL Libri Antichi internet archive at http://archive.org/details/Scansione_GIII446MiscellaneaOpal, cited in Cohen, “Seen and Known,” 397, n. 18.
- 86 Ibid., especially 396–97 and 399; Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 172–75.
- 87 “Mirror of the Harlot’s Fate,” ca. 1657, reproduced on 278–79 in Kunzle, *History of the Comic Strip: Volume 1* and Storey *Carnal Commerce*, 37. *Vita del lascivo* (“The Life of the Rake”), ca. 1660s, Venice, reproduced on 39–44 of Storey, *Carnal Commerce*.
- 88 ASB, *Ufficio delle Bollette 1549–1796*, Inventionum 1601, [np] January 22, 1601.
- 89 Ibid., [np] July 23, 1601.
- 90 Ibid., [np] January 22, 1601. John Florio defines “chiavare” as “to locke with a key. Also to transome, but now a daies abusively used for Fottere.” He defines “fottere” as “to jape, to flucke, to sard, to swive,” and “fottente” as “fucking, swiving, sarding.” Florio, *Queen Anna’s*, 97 and 194, respectively.
- 91 On the attraction of lawmen to streets known for prostitution, gambling, and drinking: Cohen, “To Pray,” 303; Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 99–100.
- 92 The complainants referred to themselves as *honorati* and *gentilhuomini*, *curiali principali*, and *artegiani buoni e da bene*. Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 91, n. 103. She dates the two letters from 1601 and 1624.

- 93 For the vice legate's order, as transcribed into the 1586 register: C de M 1586, [np], untitled, begins "Ill[ustrissim]us et R[everendissi]mus D[ominus] Bononorum Vicelegatus in eius Camera" (June 28, 1586).
 94 Cohen, "Seen and Known," 409.
 95 Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 1–2.

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5

THOUGH POPES SAID DON'T, SOME PEOPLE DID

Adulteresses in Catholic Reformation Rome

Elizabeth S. Cohen

Adultery was no simple sexual lapse. Intricately bound to the fundamental institution of marriage, it threatened honor, family, and livelihood. Traditionally, this grave offense merited harsh punishments like stoning, although by the sixteenth century these had much softened. A sin, a crime, and a breach of contract, in early modern Italy it could be prosecuted under several kinds of law. Beyond canon law's jeopardy for both spouses, under Roman law enshrining *patria potestas*, adultery was overwhelmingly a wife's transgression, to which, furthermore, she was presumed to have consented.¹ So, a vengefully passionate husband or kinsmen who killed a wife found flagrantly abed with a lover could claim immunity from prosecution for murder.² The adulteress herself figured ambiguously as a theme in Italian paintings, prints, and stories. Nevertheless, neither law nor broader cultural norms reflected adultery's complexities as social experience on the ground. To juxtapose prescriptive and lived understandings and to test the crime's notoriety, we turn to judicial records. For contrast with our culturally framed expectations and to glimpse the everyday worlds of most early modern people, this essay reconstructs four stories from adultery prosecutions in the Roman Governor's court circa 1600. The particular crimes of these non-elite women and men involved companionship and sex, but little else was directly at stake. My accounts seek to represent both social dynamics and a vernacular culture of sexuality accessible alike to the educated and the illiterate. I highlight a cluster of adulteresses who cultivated not primarily instrumental, but rather personal, alliances outside marriage. The lovers' choices transgressed and had consequences both at home and in the public courts. Nevertheless, their misconduct was not radically out of step with an everyday culture of sexuality that endured even in Catholic Reformation Rome.

Adultery had a lengthy history as a cultural, legal, and behavioral problem. From the twelfth century, an ambivalent medieval literature on human

love—from Andreas Cappelanus to Gottfried von Strassburg—suggested that passion and marriage did not mix. Despite the Renaissance emergence of more positive takes on sex, the notion persisted that intense eroticism was seldom the business of husbands and wives.³ The church still taught that marriage was the only licit setting for sex, while discouraging the pursuit of pleasure for its own sake. The iconography of love on domestic objects linked to betrothals and weddings promoted family policy as much as private spousal gratification.⁴ Although married people may not have behaved as they were told, they have left few words about sex. If conjugal relations did often tend to routine, adultery could be easily imagined by contemporaries, and by scholars since, as an agreeable alternative. Popular histories have repeatedly featured swaggering Renaissance noblemen, including prelates, who dallied sensuously with mistresses and fathered bastards. Their female partners, who ranged from servants to gentlewomen, were often married, and so adulteresses.⁵

A wife's adultery posed problems for both her spousal household and her natal family, but sometimes brought them benefits as well. Under ancient Roman law still frequently cited in the Renaissance, uncertainty about paternity and corruption of the lineage was one major cost.⁶ Adultery also rattled the public honor of a patriarchal family that could not control its assets, including the chastity and fertility of its women. These concerns appear as conventional rhetoric, but it is far from clear how much they actually drove Renaissance husbands' retribution. Certainly, charges of adultery were invoked to instigate violence against an inconvenient kinswoman and to cover other, less high-minded goals. On the other hand, where doctrines of sexual exclusivity could bend in practice, adulteresses might reap rewards rather than punishments for their liaisons, especially with powerful men. For example, Giulia Farnese, wife of the Roman baron Orsino Orsini and the mistress of Pope Alexander VI in the 1490s, arranged a cardinal's hat for her brother, Alessandro, the future Pope Paul III.⁷ Even bastards could be absorbed and their mothers supported. In the 1460s Lucrezia Landriani, married conveniently to a Milanese courtier, bore four illegitimate children to the young Galeazzo Maria Sforza before he became Duke of Milan and took a bride. Bearing their father's name and raised in his court, Lucrezia's brood included Caterina Sforza, the future indomitable Countess of Forlì.⁸ The husbands of these high-flying adulteresses managed their role, its perks and its costs, more and less deftly. In Florence, the husband of Bianca Cappello, the mistress and later wife of Grand Duke Francesco I, retaliated by intemperate womanizing of his own, and died at the hands of his paramour's kinsmen.⁹ Husbands did not take adultery lightly, but there might be multiple stakes and more than just one bloody end.

The dark emotions of adultery—jealousy and anger—struck men and women alike. Legends of aristocratic adulteresses killed *in flagrante delictu* by vengeful husbands arouse pity, horror, and titillation in later readers. Although the threat and the rhetoric surely circulated, documented historical examples are few.¹⁰ More modest women, too, had reason to fear even unmerited spousal violence.

For example, in a miracle attested in 1522, the Madonna della Quercia of Viterbo saved a woman mortally assaulted by a suspicious husband, egged on by his mother.¹¹ More peaceably, a Quattrocento necromantic recipe promised that to make a wife “persevere in honest alliance with her husband.”¹² Moreover, although adulterers were rarely prosecuted, women deeply resented their husbands’ philandering. In the 1550s a pious Bolognese gentlewoman, Ginevra Gozzadini, asked her spiritual director if she owed the marital debt to her errant husband. Though reluctant to release his disciple from godly duties, Don Leone Bartolini allowed her to decline if her husband refused to forgo his “public adultery and also grazing on his wife like a pig and not a Christian.”¹³

Renaissance Italian visual and literary culture depicted four roles in adultery’s drama: the wife; the husband or cuckold; the lover; and the chorus of the public. Though shadowed by misogyny, views of women were mixed. Ancient and medieval texts widely posited female propensities to falling in love and to undisciplined and mercenary carnality. Beauty, coupled with fickle mind, made women at once temptresses and easy prey to seducers. These risky frailties in turn justified tightly constraining rules. In parallel, *novelle*, poetry, madrigals, and *commedia dell’arte* evoked both woe and delight with representations of love and romantic adventure. Magic, too, offered women and men ways to attract and bind a lover.¹⁴ Mainstream cultural norms often lumped non-conforming women together as sexual transgressors. Yet prestige and class, singled out some for celebration. Thus, as whores, prostitutes stood for the obverse of female virtue, but courtesans, especially those dubbed counterintuitively “honest,” earned renown among elite men for their manners and cultural finesse. Even Saint Mary Magdalene appeared in paintings as the brightly dressed, or undressed, playgirl who was the foil to her model penitent. The adulteress partook of this generic bad girl, at once attractive and corrupt, but her jeopardy under law invited ambivalence. For example, many early modern artists represented the Gospel story of the woman “taken in adultery.”¹⁵ Sixteenth-century Italian paintings usually depicted a beautiful, young woman, thrust by the Pharisees’ heavy legal hand to stand alone before a crowd to be judged. Although conventional language suggested that she was in some sense caught or trapped, she was still deemed to have consented to dire offense. Viewers would hear Jesus first chide her persecutors, “Let he who is without sin cast the first stone,” and then tell her to go and sin no more. All were sinners, not least the adulteress, but law must not trump Christian mercy.

Among the men’s roles, not the male adulterer nor the wife’s lover, but rather the husbandly cuckold claimed a share of cultural preoccupation. The aristocratic choice between familial vengeance or instrumental accommodation often came down on the latter side. Instead of destroying the adulteress, the cuckold had his reasons for complacency. In visual imagery, art historians have shown betrayed husbands responding as much with dismayed forbearance as with hot ire. Comparing paintings of Joseph, the helpmate of the Virgin Mary, and Vulcan, the spouse of Venus, Francesca Alberti explained how the aging husbands of

exceptional wives, though vulnerable to mockery by artists and viewers, served divine ends.¹⁶ Louise Rice tracked Italian depictions of the cuckold from a nasty late fifteenth-century allegorical engraving through sixteenth-century literary parodies from Aretino and Modio, and finally to Baccio del Bianco's drawings. These last offered whimsically ironic scenes that normalized both the cuckold and the adulteress.¹⁷

Ambivalently allotting pleasure and agency to women and complicating the revenge narrative, *novelle* offered socially more varied cultural constructions of adultery. In the *Decameron*, Boccaccio exploited these possibilities in more than twenty-five stories featuring adultery that fancifully permuted its spousal roles.¹⁸ The married women of the *novelle*, again almost always beautiful, pursued love and reaped their adulterous pleasures with ambiguous culpability. At the expense of dull or aging husbands, some wives schemed cleverly both to achieve their desires and to elude discovery and punishment.¹⁹ Others, honest, virtuous, and alluring, had to be tricked by would-be lovers into learning that sex outside marriage was more fun.²⁰ Lucrezia in Machiavelli's *Mandragola* found similar fortune. Although female delight was only a means to an end in the *Decameron's* elegantly ironic lessons, a more literal reading of the stories at least gave a space to imagine wives' extra-domestic enjoyment.

Boccaccio's cuckolded husbands reacted variously to adultery's challenges to honor and to its remedies in law. In Day 4, Story 9, a gentlewoman let herself fall to her death after her vindictive husband fed her the heart of her paramour. Explained the woman, since she had given her love freely, she was the guilty one and not the lover. In a lighter vein, Day 3, Story 2 parodied the narratives of murder in flagrante and, less directly, of Christ forgiving the adulteress. A king, discovering his wife and a groom asleep together, cut the man's hair to mark his guilt. When the lover woke, he scotched his jeopardy by similarly tonsuring other servants. In the end, the king, rejecting a petty vendetta that would broadcast his dishonor, announced cryptically to his assembled entourage: "He that did it, do it no more, and may you all go with God."²¹ In Day 6, Story 7, a hapless husband, fearing penalty if he killed his adulterous wife himself, hauled her before the public court, where, by statute, she faced a sentence of death by fire. Unlike the Gospel's submissive adulteress, the respected Madonna Filippa staunchly defended herself with two claims. First, as in the tragedy of Day 4, she did it for her "deep and perfect" love for Lazzarino. Secondly, having gotten her husband to agree that she had always satisfied his every bodily wish, she asked: "what am I to do with the surplus? Throw it to the dogs? Is it not far better that I should present it a gentleman who loves me more dearly than himself, rather than allow it to turn bad or go to waste?" The gathered populace of Prato greeted this charming riposte with approving laughter and, at the judge's suggestion, altered the harsh statute to punish only adulteresses who did it for money.²²

Christian rules as implemented through ecclesiastical courts also reflected more everyday cultural norms. Although by medieval canon law both spouses owed the marital debt, in customary practice expectations differed for husband

and wife. As historian Cecilia Cristellon shows, the church courts of pre-Tridentine Venice aimed less to police sex than to stabilize marriages and to minimize scandal.²³ Many proceedings, often brought by women, sought to formalize separations or annulments of couples who had long since parted company. Adultery by wife or husband was a charge to blacken character but was seldom advanced as the source of a broken marriage.²⁴ In fact, among the lower orders, adultery was a common product of widespread, informal serial monogamy. Finding themselves for various reasons without present spouses, people readily took up new heterosexual partnerships. Although adulterous, such concubinage, sometimes with a formal blessing that made it bigamy, was often marriage-like and, in the absence of contrary evidence, usually accepted by the lay community. In the face of these popular habits, fifteenth-century church courts worked to sharpen the boundaries of marriage, and the Council of Trent's legislation assimilated concubinage more and more to prostitution.²⁵ Even so, ecclesiastical judges continued less to punish adulterous sex by itself than to seek better moral and spiritual discipline around marriage as a whole.

Let us turn now to Rome at the end of the sixteenth century to gauge the moral climate and social textures in which our everyday adulteries took place. For some decades Catholic reformers had worked to burnish Rome's reputation as a fitting capital for a resurgent church. Issuing repeated regulations (*bandi*) to suppress blasphemy and vice, local authorities particularly targeted gambling and adultery.²⁶ Yet these official pronouncements better registered moralistic concern than they energized a thorough cleansing of the civic body. Parallel rules sought to constrain the practice of prostitution, although that trade and fornication by the unmarried were transgressive but not criminal. The magistrates' concerns turned mostly on guarding sacred sites from taint and restraining violence and disorder by prostitutes' clients. Yet enforcement of decrees around illicit sex remained sporadic. Pius V's ghetto for prostitutes of the late 1560s at the Ortaccio did not last long as either structure or policy. That moment was the reformists' exception rather than the trend. The early sixteenth-century celebrity of Rome's honest courtesans had certainly waned, but in 1580 the gentleman traveler Montaigne was still keen to admire and visit their kind.²⁷ More generally, the historian of crime Peter Blastedbrei concluded that, for two decades immediately post-Trent, Rome was *de facto* quite accommodating of heterosexual irregularities and sometimes attracted couples seeking to escape sharper discipline elsewhere.²⁸ All told, by 1600, reform in the papal city had subdued the Renaissance culture of fleshly pleasures, but effective suppression of non-marital sex was scarcely true on the ground.

The labyrinth of Rome's institutions and, especially, the mobile demography of its residents consistently subverted the religious and moral aspirations of its leadership.²⁹ The city's population swelled, from 35,000 in 1527, after the catastrophic Sack by Hapsburg imperial troops, to around 100,000 in 1600.³⁰ Few people were native Romans. Visitors and migrants flowed in—men and women, of all social ranks from ambassadors and *nobildonne* to pilgrims, cattledrivers,

and servants. Many also left town. In a fluid residential geography, most people rented their accommodations and often moved house. Although many households had a nuclear core or its remnants, complete families were fewer than in many cities.³¹ Lodgers and informal clusters of housemates were common. People also changed jobs frequently, and some worked in one part of the city but, regularly or occasionally, ate and slept elsewhere. As a result, ordinary Romans had repeatedly to renegotiate the personnel and terms of daily life.

Furthermore, Rome's sharply skewed sex ratio yielded distinctive economic and marital dynamics. The urban population counted, roughly, only 70 women for every 100 men. Celibate clerics were not the primary culprits. Many of the surplus men came to the city to provide for the needs and comforts of a courtly society, by serving in great households of prelates or secular lords or by supplying goods.³² With males doing much of the domestic work and without a major textile industry, the market for female labor in turn was weak. Of the many men, some married in Rome to help establish themselves, but others had wives elsewhere, or were young and not ready to settle down.³³ Although some, nubile, women found husbands readily, many others were left to improvise when fathers died or spouses left town for shorter or longer absences. Typically, they struggled to live piecemeal from laundry, spinning, and sewing. As in Venice, concubinage was common. Prostitution, too, though never as rampant as some hysterical reformers claimed, was another, potentially better paid recourse. Often informally and intermittently, younger, more presentable or gregarious women offered mixes of sexual, social, and domestic services to a shifting contingent of unpartnered men, and to some husbands as well.

As a concubine or prostitute, a married woman faced legal jeopardy for adultery. When a husband did not, as obligated, support his wife, she had to find alternatives. Sometimes, he had wasted the dowry. Often, he had been long away, having intentionally or not abandoned his wife. A woman, in turn, unknowing if her spouse had died, often proceeded as if he had and set up new partnerships. In the absence of contrary information, neighbors tended to presume legitimacy for couples who lived appropriately, including taking the sacraments at church. Nevertheless, married women living as prostitutes, concubines, or even bigamist wives were liable, if denounced, to prosecution.

The discipline and prosecution of adultery in early modern Rome has left only erratic traces. No trial records survive from the tribunal of the Vicario, who bore many of the city's episcopal functions for the pope.³⁴ As an offense of "mixti fori," however, adultery sometimes came before the criminal courts.³⁵ Killing women for honor was rare, especially in the city, and the ferocity of the ancient law had attenuated. Going to law, though risking unwelcome publicity, became more common, even for noblemen.³⁶ In the 1580 edition of Rome's *Statuta*, carnal and associated crimes occupied a brief three pages and mostly specified due punishments.³⁷ In practice, these penalties were often negotiated down, so the statutory guidelines are interesting mostly as a reflection of judicial thinking and broader cultural values. This section began with sodomy and a terse

pronouncement of death by burning. Next, a longer paragraph, *De Adulterio e incestu*, spoke first of “adultery with incest,” before turning to “simple adultery.” For this last, punishments were calibrated to the woman’s honesty and the man’s social rank. For sex with an “honest” wife, a plebian man faced a hefty fine of 200 scudi and three years of exile. A gentleman owed double the fine and the exile, and a baron triple. Notably, this scale of penalties targeted the common circumstance of high-status men making alliances with women of lower rank. On the other hand, the chance that even a middling family would successfully haul a nobleman into court was slim. Continuing, the statute declared that if the wife was poor and “*inhonesta*, but not a public prostitute,” the penalties were halved.³⁸ Reputation (*fama*) in the neighborhood legally determined a woman’s “honesty.”³⁹ At the same time, where early modern criminal law recognized that virgins might resist forcible defloration (*stupro*), wives were still held complicit in adultery.⁴⁰ Thus, every proven adulteress was, in principle, to be sequestered for correction in a *casa pia* for errant wives (*malmaritate*), where her husband or family paid her expenses.

From the later sixteenth century, adultery came before the Governor’s court by two routes. By legal tradition, reiterated in the *Statuta*, sexual crimes involving respectable women received public intervention only when brought by a kinsman with honor at stake. Institutional justice, seeking to promote itself and to tame the violence of self-help vendetta, encouraged this recourse with some success. Thus, husbands initiated many of the Governor’s adultery trials, although typically with a keen eye to retaining spousal property.⁴¹ On occasion, angry women prosecuted their husbands for adultery.⁴² To note, the Governor’s criminal court in general took seriously women’s complaints, even without male backing. Their testimony as accused or witness, usually recorded under the same intimidating circumstances as men’s, bore analogous weight. Especially for offenders from the lower social ranks, adultery also came to the court’s attention by an investigation *ex officio*, on the state’s initiative. Usually, a secret report by a mercenary spy or grouchy neighbor launched the case, followed by a police raid.⁴³ Such arrests were often handled by summary justice that imposed a fine and issued an injunction against further misconduct.⁴⁴ A few cases led to full trials, and my stories here of “simple adultery” are among them.⁴⁵

Although these examples were not formally typical, they involved ordinary people getting into relatively routine kinds of trouble. Bodies and honor were at stake, but neither money nor property were central for either husbands or wives. All the women had engaged actually or potentially in sex with men of their own choosing outside the bonds of marriage. From the tales of these willing adulteresses who ended up in court, we can learn about a range of possibilities for extra-marital adventures and about the narratives and discourses that explained them and hoped to extenuate culpability. These women, though several years married, were often young. In other Governor’s court trials around flawed marriages the wives typically complained of mistreatment to justify their straying. In none of these four stories, however, did that rhetoric appear. The husbands, when they

suspected or learned what was afoot, were angry, but the trials were not about ending a marriage. The lovers, themselves unmarried, were among the many unattached men in Rome, and met the adulteresses through family and local connections. Also telling are the ways that neighbors and colleagues took part, both in the trysts and in their discovery and discipline.

In my first two adultery stories, unhappy husbands tried, more or less cannily, to corral their wandering wives. For both, events transpired close to home. In the first case, the spouses spoke of Tridentine teachings to repair a troubled marriage. The pastoral discipline had failed to work, however, and the next time the irate husband resorted to self-help, seriously beating his incorrigible wife. The domestic violence brought the problem to public notice. In the second story, the husband confronted his wife with her misconduct reported by neighbors. When she faced down his efforts at proper spousal correction and still continued to roam, the husband turned for help to the ecclesiastical and public authorities. They, in time, intervened, but notably declined to rush into a private matter without good cause.

The first tale provocatively mixed elements of Boccaccio with Catholic reform teaching to the laity. A very short trial from May 1593 recounted adultery trouble that exploded within the cramped premises of a fruit and vegetable seller in central Rome.⁴⁶ After the beleaguered husband, Hieronimo, had resorted to self-help, the resulting domestic violence led an unnamed informant to alert the police. In this instance, probably because the wife, Caterina, lay injured, instead of collecting testimony at the prison, the notary first hurried to the respectable shopkeeper's premises to interview both spouses. Husband and wife testified immediately in the heat of events and again, later, in jail. The would-be lover, the shop assistant Leonardo, nimbly decamped before the law arrived.

As was common for many city dwellers, Hieronimo Ursini from Milan kept shop on the street floor and lived upstairs with his wife, Caterina, but evidently had no children. Two *garzoni* (shop assistants) slept in an adjacent room. The fruitseller had good reason to suspect his young wife. By his account, Caterina, whom he spied often flirting in the window "with this one and that one," had repeatedly tried his patience. Worse, he once had caught her at her mother's house, "almost in the act" of having sex with a tavern keeper. Nevertheless, Hieronimo averred piously, "I forgave her, and she promised to do no more wrong, and we confessed together to the parish priest and took communion, and I took her back and led her home, pardoning everything and keeping her always as well as possible" (ff. 1125r-v). Portraying himself as a pious and forgiving husband, Hieronimo sought to meliorate the court's view of his later, less irenic, behavior. The testimony, which likely was approximately true, shows us a man of modest status deftly invoking good Catholic teaching. Caterina in turn confessed, "Truly, I did wrong (*torto*) to do what I did to my husband, because I once fell into error (*errore*) at my mother's house, where I had sex with Giovanni Angelo the tavern keeper, and even so, my husband forgave me and took me

back into the house" (ff. 1128r–v). Here she acknowledged not only Hieronimo's forbearance, but also her own inclinations to illicit pleasure.

Hieronimo's jealousy thus primed, on a May morning he climbed early out of the bed that he shared with his flirtatious wife. According to his testimony, he intended to go to a garden on the edge of the city to cut artichokes for the shop. He tried to rouse his two *garzoni* who were sleeping in another room. One got up, but Leonardo, also from Milan, claimed to be sick and would not rise. Suspecting the lay-a-bed of setting a "trap," Hieronimo sent the other assistant out to collect the produce, but he himself slipped into the shop and hid behind a barrel. After a while, Leonardo entered the shop, "sighing," according to the hidden Hieronimo, "an amorous sigh." A few minutes later, Caterina appeared, asking where her husband was. "Gone to cut artichokes," replied Leonardo. Immediately, said Hieronimo, Caterina began to adjust the *garzone's* ruff (*fare le lattughe*), and quickly the two became playful and kissed each other. The husband, seeing that "Leonardo wanted to lift her skirts and do his thing (*fare il fatto suo*)," burst out of hiding shouting, "Oh traitor, oh traitor, you do this to me!" (ff. 1126r–v). Seeing his master thus enraged, Leonardo, expediently, slipped out the shop door and disappeared from the story. Caterina retreated hastily up the stairs, and Hieronimo surged after, beating her with a broomhandle, a domestic weapon of choice for women as well as men, with his fists, and with his belt. So incensed was he that he pinned her down with his knees on her belly and then on her shoulders, while hauling on her braids, so that he left her "as if dead," swollen, bloody, and with bruises "blacker than your Lordship's hat" (ff. 1126v–1127r). Hieronimo volunteered all these details, and one suspects that he may have shocked even himself with his ferocity.

Caterina's tale of the putative adultery and its sorry aftermath provides another perspective. Not surprisingly, she presented herself as aggrieved and "mistreated." Nevertheless, she reported a similar account leading to the flirtatious exchange with Leonardo. Her husband, having left early without a word, she rose two hours later. Going into the next room, Caterina roused Leonardo to get up and open the shop, while she swept. When she went down for a basket to hold the sweepings, she found Leonardo, wrestling with a pair of sleeves. He asked for help in attaching them, and the two began laughing as they struggled with the laces. Just then, Hieronimo sprang out and began to assault his wife. Confirming Hieronimo's confessed details and adding blows with the head of a hatchet, Caterina claimed that he wanted to kill her. But, "please God," he had not (f. 1125v). Later, pressured by the court at a second interrogation, the wife admitted to some greater provocation of her husband. In this version, as she came into the shop, Leonardo asked that she help lace his sleeves and moaned about not feeling well. She joked that he was not going to die, and they began to play so that, as in Hieronimo's account, the *garzone* had kissed her "lustfully (*lusuriosamente*)" on the cheek and she responded in kind (f. 1128r–v).

Though more theatrical than some tales, this domestic drama had several points in common with other neighborhood adulteries. First, illicit relations

sprouted very close to home. These were the settings—through work and domestic propinquity—in which wives were likely to meet other men. Perhaps surprisingly to us, these were also the spaces in which adultery—its initiations and often its consummations—took place. People understood the risks and costs of getting caught; at the same time, privacy, such as we imagine it, was simply not a reality for most people. While married, Caterina had practiced serious flirtations first in her mother's house and then in her husband's, with one of their live-in employees. Even if no real sex had transpired with Leonardo, Caterina saw the wrongful pattern of her conduct. She evidently enjoyed the play and appreciation of her guilty encounters, but she gave little sign of personal feelings for her lovers. In contrast, there does seem to have been some commitment, however flawed on both sides, between the spouses. While we may doubt that Caterina changed her ways, she did express a sense of responsibility and a belief that she should make peace with her husband. The brevity of the trial suggests that the magistrate was content to dispatch the matter quietly. Both spouses had to answer for their transgressions—Caterina's sexual misconduct and Hieronimo's excessive correction.⁴⁷

The second story of adultery is the only one of the four where the husband himself brought his private troubles to the authorities.⁴⁸ For more than six months, Bartolomeo from Genoa, alerted by friends, investigated suspicions and then sought to correct his errant wife, Isabetta from Rome. He had tried several times in previous months to enlist the help of the Vicario's ecclesiastical tribunal, but in vain. Recently, however, he had procured a warrant, probably from the Governor's court (ff. 832r–v, 834r). So, a police patrol met Bartolomeo outside the building where the lovers had been seen and at his direction made arrests that led to the trial.⁴⁹ Events took place in a shared neighborhood and within a community of workers, several of whom testified. In this slightly larger, but still face-to-face social terrain, friends and neighbors, notably men this time, had a crucial role in managing their comrade's disarray.

On Saturday, October 22, 1604, right after the arrests, Bartolomeo, coachman to a Monsignor Dandini, complained formally against his wife and Francesco Cappelli from Florence (ff. 831r–v). Bartolomeo had married Isabetta six years earlier; although native Roman women were few, they often married men from outside who sought to establish themselves in the capital. It was a second marriage for Isabetta, who had a grown stepson and a son who lived together in another neighborhood (f. 840v). Bartolomeo lived with Isabetta and their young son near San Pantaleone in the city center. The accused lover, a twelve-year resident of Rome who served as coachman to another churchman, the Archbishop of Monreale, worked from a stable nearby. Bartolomeo's complaint charged Isabetta with spending "unusually much (*piu dell'ordinario*)" time with Francesco. According to reports from several men, including a third coachman, while Bartolomeo lay on his sick bed, Isabetta came and went late in the evening from the stables where Francesco worked. Once healthy again, Bartolomeo berated his wife for her visits and threatened her with arrest and public whipping (f. 831r). She, however, denied all charges and challenged her husband to do his worst

(f. 831v). Nevertheless, Bartolomeo asked his friends to spy on her movements (ff. 833v–834r). One morning Bartolomeo's nephew brought word that Isabetta had been spotted a few streets away going with Francesco into the Palazzo de Picchi. Bartolomeo sent a messenger to alert the city police. When they arrived, Bartolomeo told them to arrest Francesco, then descending the stairs. The husband entered the building, collected Isabetta, and sent her, too, off to jail (f. 831v). Note that the Governor's police were willing to act, but left it to the respectable husband to hand over his wife.

After the arrests, neighbors and colleagues testified to having seen Francesco and Isabetta often together over many months and hearing talk in the piazza of their being lovers. One man observed her three or four times in the last month taking advantage of walking her son to school to stop to talk with Francesco in the courtyard of the Massimi family palace (f. 837v). Another neighbor, Alfonso, intervened directly. Because, he said, Isabetta was his *commare*, his spiritual kinswoman, he had invited her a month earlier to his house. There, with his own wife present, Alfonso told the wayward Isabetta of the rumors that she was in love (*inamorata*) with Francesco and having sex with him. Alfonso urged to her to smarten up (*stesse in cervello*) and amend her ways, because her husband knew and had a warrant to send her to jail, and because it dishonored Alfonso himself, who had helped marry her so respectably (ff. 834r–v).

In their early testimonies, the lovers took different tacks. The unattached Francesco downplayed the whole business. He acknowledged, as did Isabetta, that they had known each other in the neighborhood for three or four years. Yet Francesco dismissed her presence in his room or any adulterous reasons for it, "I cannot know the heart of that woman or why she came up" (f. 835v). Isabetta, pressed hard through several interrogations, tried ineffectually to parry the court's questions. She garbed herself conventionally as a dutiful housewife who minded her own business and seldom went out: "I have to keep working if I want to live" (f. 841r). Accordingly, she implausibly denied knowing local geography; then, insisting that she had never set foot in the stables, she fudged the meanings of being "inside" a place (f. 839r). She invoked her own good name, though in an elaborately conditional mode: "What do you imagine, your Lordship, if I had gone out while my husband was sick, that would have been a fine honor from me" (f. 839v). Blaming her neighbors for their spiteful testimony, she invoked the chronic enmities of local life: "what fine witnesses are these? this is how they repay the courtesies and good will that I have used with them" (f. 843r). Later, however, she backtracked on some of these claims with a pathetic tale of going out at night to fetch some greens to feed the ailing Bartolomeo. Passing by the stable's open door, she said, Francesco had called out to her, "how is your husband?" I, in tears, answered that the doctor offered little hope, and then Francesco responded, 'look, if you need anything, be it money or anything else, just ask'" (ff. 843r–v). Spun this way, the errant wife's visit to the stable got folded into a stirring picture of her desperate efforts to help her husband and of the fellow coachman's sympathetic offer of aid.

Near the end of the trial, the accused lovers, confronted with repeated testimony to their private meetings at the stable and in the *palazzo*, were pushed to address the presumption that they met for sex. As a judge said in another trial, “*solus con sola*, one does not presume they are saying the paternoster.”⁵⁰ When pressed, Francesco exclaimed, “Your Lordship, I will take 100,000 oaths that I had no carnal doings with Isabetta!” He continued, “I can show your Lordship that only with great difficulty can I go with women, and when I do, it is rarely and to my great injury (*danno*), because four ribs got cut by a Turkish scimitar when I served as a soldier on the galleys of the Grand Duke” of Tuscany (f. 849v). Here we have detail so baroque that we may have to believe it. Francesco aimed to suggest, with timeless logic, that his encounters with Isabetta were not, actually, sex. Whatever it was, however, he feared culpability and had tried, with various moves, to deflect it. Interestingly, Isabetta’s final remarks also denied a sexual relationship by alluding to Francesco’s behavior. In her words, “if he were as proper (*netto*) with other women as he is with me, he would never have had sex with any woman.” Then, reaffirming her veracity, she concluded with a shift to a rhetoric of intention and sin, “If I had done wrong (*errore*) and if Francesco had sex with me, I would say so freely and ask for forgiveness, but because I did not do it, I cannot say I did” (ff. 850v–851r). Much more was at stake for Isabetta than for her lover. Knowing well that, in sneaking around while her husband was ill, she had erred in the eyes of her peers, she did not counter Bartolomeo’s charges with complaints of mistreatment. Yet she stood on her word that she could not confess a lie. There the trial record ended with the usual legal instruction that both accused parties be released into the jail’s public rooms (*ad largam*) with three days to prepare a defense.

Accumulated circumstantial evidence, rather than catching lovers in the sexual act, was sufficient for neighbors and, in turn, their *publica vox et fama* attesting to the offense had weight in court. Nevertheless, perhaps fearing retaliation, people appear not to have turned each other in too quickly. Once an adulterous coupling became common, local knowledge, a friend or associate might assay an informal warning to wife, husband, or lover. Consensus likely deemed these matters family business, better handled privately and with minimal scandal. In this case, Bernardino not only chose official help, but had to persist to get it.

In two other stories private adultery and its public prosecution unfolded in different circumstances. Here the adulteresses took advantage of wider urban terrains when pursuing their romantic yearnings. The husbands, although present in the city, were not principal players in bringing the cases to court. Neighbors, on the other hand, took active part, facilitating the alliances or tolerating them for some time, until a moment arrived when someone alerted the authorities. These times, when the police raided an illicit rendezvous, they acted *ex officio*, on the newer legal premise that the court could intervene directly, without a kinsman’s request, to ensure order among the city’s lower-status residents.

In a third episode of simple adultery, prosecuted in January 1605, the husband, Giovanni Domenico, was in fact the last to know. The short trial consists of a

police report and testimonies from several neighborhood witnesses.⁵¹ Neither wife nor lover spoke on record, but procedural annotations at the document's end register their choice not to challenge any of the witnesses. Most likely, the adulterers accepted a summary decision that ordered them to pay fines and agree formally not to consort any more.

Giovanni Domenico di Mattei from Lombardy and his wife, Madalena, lived on the Tiber Island with their two young children and an orphan boy whom they kept "for the love of God" (f. 145v). Husband and wife shared a business selling doughnuts from their home (f. 143r). Giovanni Domenico also commuted daily across the city to Piazza Capranica to work as an assistant to a doughnut-maker (*ciambellaro*) (f. 145r). The job required his being away overnight, but every morning he returned to his family quarters, evidently bringing pastries to sell. One Wednesday morning, Giovanni Domenico came home to find that Madalena had been arrested, along with Pietro Gallo from Parma, a twenty-five-year-old barber's garzone who lived two doors down the street (ff. 144r, 145v).

According to the official report, a neighbor's denunciation had informed the authorities that "every night after four hours (10 p.m.) Pietro habitually goes to sleep with Madalena" (f. 143r). Receiving word again last night that the barber was there, the police raided the house late on a chilly January evening. With professional savvy, the lieutenant posted men to watch the exits before knocking on Madalena's door, which she opened after a few minutes' delay. While a search inside found no man, a loud noise overhead alerted the police to visit the roof, but in vain. They did soon discover the barber in his nightshirt in his own bed, where he protested that he had been checking the premises above on behalf of his absent landlord. Unconvinced, the police led the two lovers off to jail (ff. 143v–145r).

When Giovanni Domenico came home to the unpleasant surprise of his wife's arrest, he learned that Pietro the barber, carrying a sword (a further offense), had been in the house at night with Madalena. The cuckolded husband went immediately to make a formal complaint and to demand, according to the protocol, the severest punishments for Pietro, Madalena, and anyone with a part in "leading him to her" (ff. 145r–v). The young orphan, Giovanni Santi, nicknamed Scimiotto (Little Monkey), also testified then under his master's auspices. The boy explained that, during the four months that he had lived in the household, Madalena had many times sent him to invite the barber to eat, and that, when Giovanni Domenico was away, Pietro stayed to sleep. He shared the bed with Madalena and the two children, while the young witness slept on the floor in the same room. The lover usually entered through the door, but sometimes through a window belonging to a laundress (ff. 146r–v).

During her husband's nightly absences and in plain view of the neighbors, Madalena had carried on adulterously with, like the other women, a young, unmarried man who lived nearby. The affair (*amicizia*) had been going on for as much as two years, according to gossip in the local wineshop (f. 148v). A hat-maker who lived in the house between the two lovers had for six months heard

local “murmuring” that Pietro was having sex (*negotiava*) with Madalena. In passing back and forth, the neighbor had many times seen the barber in her house, their “talking and laughing together publicly . . . sometimes in the morning, sometimes after eating, sometimes toward evening” (f. 147r). Often, said the hatmaker, other men also hung out convivially at the shop, eating doughnuts, or, in season, roasted chestnuts (f. 148v). Giovanni Domenico must have been around sometimes when such sociability, presumably good for business, took place. Yet, about a month before the arrests, the hatmaker saw fit one day in his shop to warn the young barber: “the people of Trastevere say you’re having sex with the doughnut-maker’s wife; if you don’t straighten up, you’ll go to jail.” When Pietro denied it, the hatmaker replied that it was not his business, but that the barber had better mind his (f. 147r). Cesare the tavern keeper had also challenged Pietro. Several weeks ago, Cesare had gone to Madalena’s to borrow matches and found her eating with the barber and another man. Seeing the tavern keeper, Pietro had slipped away to hide. Later that day, Madalena’s small son came to Cesare’s house to get a light. Jokingly, he asked the boy: “who was sleeping with your mother last night?” (f. 148r). Later still, Pietro stormed into the tavern and began to threaten the host, saying that he should take care of his own house and not speak of others, or that he would get his head stove in. Cesare, figuring out how his words had passed from the child to his mother and to Pietro, protested that he had only spoken in jest (f. 148r).

Although propinquity and opportunity during Giovanni Domenico’s regular absences clearly favored the liaison, we must guess at what drew these two lovers together. The unmarried barber could readily have found sex and even a quasi-domestic companionship elsewhere among the city’s prostitutes. The illicit pair seemed to enjoy each other’s company, alone together and also in groups. In Rome where many men were on their own, taking meals in others’ houses, sometimes in return for a contribution in food or money, was not unusual. Pietro’s sleeping over, especially when he lived so close by, was less acceptable. Interestingly, though, no one called Madalena a whore or said that she was in it for money. This suggests that there was something companionable about the connection, and that may have colored local reactions, at least initially. Some shift of neighborhood opinion in recent weeks, however, had led the hatmaker to confront Pietro and the tavern keeper to make his tactless joke to Madalena’s son. How, then, did the cuckolded husband not suspect? Seemingly, none of the neighbors said anything to him. At least, when he came home to discover the arrests, he hastily adopted a posture of righteous ignorance and mustered shreds of domestic mastery by adding his complaint to the magistrate’s file. Nevertheless, given local practices, the marriage probably muddled on.

The fourth case shows a different pattern of adulterous assignment.⁵² The lovers had been acquainted through family connections for several years. The older married woman, infatuated with a younger man, a cloth dealer, organized their sexual trysts. Completely absent from the trial, the cuckolded husband figured only as an angry specter in his wife’s mind. Here again, a neighbor’s denunciation

launched the official investigation. Testimonies from the two lovers and from several women neighbors arrested with them confirmed and extended the police report.

On Saturday, March 23, 1602, in mid-afternoon, a police patrol raided a modest upstairs room in the Vicolo Lancelotti near the Tiber river. According to their lieutenant, an unnamed local informant reported that a married woman had been meeting a lover there on Saturdays for some months (ff. 1219r–v). The lodging belonged to Filippa from Romagna, a weaver and the wife of Hieronimo Morini, though evidently alone in Rome (f. 1220r). Two other women on their own, including Filippa's *commare* Marcella, also shared the staircase. On Saturday, hearing men barge into the building, the weaver was able to warn the lovers, so that the police arrived to find the pair, both fully clothed, the man sitting on the bed and the woman standing beside him. But when the man rose, lifting his cloak from the bed, the lieutenant spotted a "shape" (*forma*) betraying the couple's activity (f. 1219r). The woman, Livia, was known to all present as the wife of Pietropaolo Panicarolo, a carpenter from Milan (f. 1224v). Confronted by the police, she threw herself tearfully on her knees and begged not to be taken to prison, because "this is the time" that her husband would kill her. The man, Marino Marcutio from Gubbio, took an officer aside, saying "I am a merchant" and offering money or whatever he wanted in order to let them go, the woman in particular (ff. 1219r–v). But the righteous policeman refused the bribe, bound the pair, and sent them to jail.

The adultery's backstory emerged from the interrogations. Livia testified that she had been married for twenty-six years, although she likely included a brief first marriage contracted when she was very young (ff. 1225r–v). That husband had died before she was old enough to go live with him, and probably she had been wed soon again to Pietropaolo. In any case, in 1602 Livia must have been at least thirty-five and maybe older. She lived with her husband, but, like Caterina and Hieronimo in the first story, they had no children. Besides Livia's fear of Pietropaolo's violence should he discover the adultery, we know nothing of their relationship.

As in the third case, the geography in this one spread out across the center of the city. Livia lived currently not far from the Trevi Fountain and was accustomed to moving good distances around the city on her own (f. 1221v). Marino, a younger man, kept shop across town on a corner where the street of the Chia-vari met the Piazza Giudea (f. 1220v). Livia had come to know Marino eight years before in her own home, where she nursed his seriously ill cousin, who later died (ff. 1227r, 1229r). Marino had also shared recreation and games with her husband, Pietropaolo, and the merchant's parents had more recently lodged in the carpenter's quarters during the Holy Year of 1600 (f. 1229r). Through these domestic encounters, Livia had fallen in love with Marino and had long strategized to meet him discreetly for sex. Livia had known Filippa for two years, during which time the weaver, who worked on a loom in her room, had made three cloths for the more affluent carpenter's wife (f. 1221r). Filippa had visited

Livia's house to collect yarn for the loom and to deliver finished cloth, and Livia had called in the Vicolo Lancelotti, although it was a good way from her home. So, bumping into Filippa at various spots around town, Livia importuned her repeatedly for the use of her room to meet Marino (f. 1221v). Though reluctant, Filippa eventually gave in to the woman who gave her work. At risk of being charged as a go-between, the weaver said she had refused any compensation, but Livia said that she had given Filippa five *giulii* for the two recent assignations (f. 1227v).

In Livia's own words, she had loved and been in love (*inamorata*) with Marino for years, and her infatuation had propelled her to arrange a series of private encounters "not having opportunity to enjoy him (*goderlo*) in my house out of respect for my husband" (f. 1225r). Livia and Marino both acknowledged having met privately a number of times at Filippa's room, and twice in the last week that was the focus of the investigation. On the Monday before the arrests, the pair had had a rendezvous at Filippa's house. Duly chaperoned by a nephew, who left immediately, Livia arrived first after the midday meal and joined the weaver in her room. Marino appeared about a half hour later, bringing some collars for starching as a standard cover story for his presence. After chatting briefly, Filippa withdrew and left the pair alone. Sometimes, the door was open during the couple's visits, but on this, as on another, occasion they had been locked inside for about an hour (f. 1221r). When later the policeman asked Filippa what the couple had been doing, she replied, "you know very well that when a man and a woman are together, it is not licit to see what they are doing" (f. 1219v).

Although all the women witnesses echoed the sentiment that Livia was in love, it was not clear whether, when the couple next met on Saturday, they had sex. Livia was angry with Marino, because she thought that he was chasing another woman, and they had had words. She also insisted with dubious piety, "on Saturday I don't commit sin, not even with my husband (*il sabbato non fo il peccato, ne anco con mio marito*)" (ff. 1221r, 1225r). Although during the arrests Marino had tried to protect Livia, under interrogation his story aimed first to exonerate himself. He acknowledged that he had met Livia once before Christmas, twice before Carnival, and another two times during Lent, but, he insisted, only to talk. Making the implausible claim that he only sought the carpenter's wife's help in order to secure a "simple benefice" for his brother who was a student, he denied sex altogether (f. 1229v). Describing their emotional bond, he notably cast the feelings in terms of Livia's warmth toward him, "she is a friend to me and loving because she has helped me (*mi e amica et amorevole perche mi ha fatto de servitii*)," referring to her nursing his mother and cousin (ff. 1231v–1232r).⁵³

To dislodge the lovers' conflicting testimony and to convict Marino, the court proceeded to torture the adulteress in front of the merchant (f. 1234r–v). Using the lighter instruments of the *sibille* that compressed the hands, this formal act of judicial stagecraft intended, as in Artemisia Gentileschi's case, to authorize the claims of the sexually compromised woman.⁵⁴ The tactic failed, nonetheless, to elicit a change in Marino's testimony that denied any sex, or touch, or kisses,

or even hearing that Livia was in love with him (f. 1236v). The judge probably did not believe Marino, but legally his respectability and his adamancy held good weight. Livia's unknown fate, on the other hand, would have lain in part with her invisible husband.

If less dramatic than high culture's renderings of adultery, adorned by the heft of law, familiar biblical tropes, and colorful narrative in paint and words, these everyday stories of wives seeking illicit moments of love and fun have their own art and pathos. For example, there is the coachman Francesco's alleged sexual impairment due to a Turkish scimitar injury. Or the hardworking doughnut guy cuckolded by the young barber. Or Filippa the poor weaver, who got into trouble because her friend and employer Livia wore down her resistance to playing hostess to a sexual rendezvous. Paradoxically perhaps, the criminal court's address to transgression here tells us more about what really happened, and what happened to most people some of the time than the great dramas of high art. Despite reformers' efforts to discipline marriage and sex, a customary culture that tolerated various forms of heterosexual error persisted in Rome long after Trent. In these four cases, only one husband sought the court's help. In the others, neighborhood informants alerted the authorities to a public disorder, but only after an adulterous liaison had been known in their midst for some time. While the Governor's court prosecuted lovers as well as errant wives, the women usually had more to lose, but also perhaps to gain. Even if unwise, some married women broke the rules and went looking for love. What they found was usually close to home so that their adventures took place under the eyes of a local community. These neighbors knew often well before the law got involved and responded in diverse ways. Adultery posed a social problem that demanded a solution, sooner or later. Although the law had its own ambitions, in these sorts of everyday misdeeds justice did not intervene with a devastating external discipline.

Notes

- 1 Cristellon, "Public Display," 182–85, summarizes Italian legal and customary views of adultery.
- 2 Clarus, *Opera omnia*, 51b.
- 3 Besides essays in Matthews-Grieco, ed., *Erotic Cultures*, see Bayer, ed., *Art and Love*, including essays by Musacchio (29–41) and Grantham Turner (178–84).
- 4 Ajmer-Wollheim, "'The Spirit is Ready'"
- 5 McClure, *Parlour Games*, 36–38.
- 6 Esposito, "Donna e fama," 97–98, states this standard view.
- 7 Cussen, "Matters of Honour," 61–67.
- 8 Lev, *The Tigress of Forlì*, 3–20.
- 9 Musacchio, "Adultery, Cuckoldry," 11–34; on Piero's death 17–18.
- 10 On wife-killing by nobleman Carlo Gesualdo in Naples, 1590, see Ober, "Murders, Madrigals"; on Vittoria Savelli in the Roman hinterland, 1563, see Cohen, *Love and Death*, 15–42. Killings of noble wives not caught *in flagrante delicto* often had motives linked to claims on property or power rather jealous rage.
- 11 Esposito, "Donne e fama," 98 + n. 61.

- 12 Gal, Boudet, and Moulinier-Brogi, eds., *Vedrai mirabilia*, 241.
- 13 Kaborycha, ed., *A Corresponding Renaissance*, 172 + n. 19.
- 14 Gal, Boudet, and Moulinier-Brogi, *Vedrai mirabilia*, 251.
- 15 Examples include: Titian (1510); Rocco Marconi (1525); Palma il Vecchio (1525–28); Lorenzo Lotto (1528); Tintoretto (1545–48); Alessandro Allori (1577).
- 16 Alberti, “‘Divine Cuckolds.’”
- 17 Rice, “The Cuckoldries.”
- 18 Boccaccio, *Decameron*.
- 19 For example, Day 3, Story 3; Day 7, Story 2.
- 20 For example, Day 3, Story 2; Day 4, Story 2.
- 21 Ibid., 241–46. My translation of the quote.
- 22 Ibid., 500–01.
- 23 Cristellon, *Marriage, the Church*, 14–19, 159–90. For French parallels, see Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages*, 165–208.
- 24 Ferraro, *Marriage Wars* also includes cases in secular courts, where issues of property, often pursued by husbands, have greater visibility; yet women brought many more suits than men, 29–30. In the complaints, adultery was generally subordinate to other concerns, 71.
- 25 Cristellon, “Public Display,” 175–76, 180–85.
- 26 Scaduto, ed. *Registi dei bandi*, vol. 1 (anni 1234–1605), *passim*.
- 27 Storey, *Carnal Commerce*, 108–14, 242–43.
- 28 Blastenbrei, *Kriminalität im Rom*, 274–75.
- 29 Cohen and Cohen, “Justice and Crime.”
- 30 Sonnino, “Population,” 50–70.
- 31 Da Molin, *Famiglia*, 93–95.
- 32 Sonnino, “Population,” 62–64. See also, Nussdorfer, “Masculine Hierarchies.”
- 33 Da Molin, *Famiglia*, 243.
- 34 The unexplained disappearance of Vicariato tribunal records precludes Roman comparisons with Venice.
- 35 Marchisello, “‘Alieni,’” 133–83. See also in the same volume, Esposito, “Adulterio.”
- 36 Blastenbrei, *Kriminalität im Rom*, 273, n. 160.
- 37 *Statuta almae urbis Romae*, 108–09, for what follows.
- 38 Forcibly abducting prostitutes was a crime. Ibid., 109.
- 39 Esposito, “Donna e fama,” 89–90.
- 40 Marchisello, “Alieni,” 137, 166–68; Esposito, “Adulterio,” 26–27.
- 41 Alternatively, the legal narrative for the charge of *sviamento*, leading astray, shifted more blame onto the lover.
- 42 For example, Archivio di Stato di Roma, Governatore, Tribunale criminale (hereafter ASR GTC), Processi, xvi secolo, busta 256 (1592), ff. 540r–62; see also, Blastenbrei, *Kriminalität im Rom*, 272, 275.
- 43 For example, ASR GTC, Processi, xvii secolo, busta 25, ff. 17r–26v; (1603); busta 91, ff. 1153r–1159r (1610).
- 44 In parallel, the *Statuta almae urbis Romae*, 110, declared that men keeping concubines were liable for fines of 50 scudi.
- 45 Counts based on small numbers of surviving records do not reflect behaviour or even patterns of prosecution. Nevertheless, it may be useful to note that this type of “simple adulteries” represent about a quarter of the adultery prosecutions between 1590 and 1610.
- 46 ASR GTC, Processi, xvi secolo, busta 270, ff. 1124r–1128v. References to specific folios appear in parentheses in text.
- 47 The trial record ended with the usual note that those charged had three days to prepare their formal defense. I have found no record of a judgment, but it is likely that the couple were fined.
- 48 ASR GTC, Processi, xvii secolo, busta 37, ff. 830r–851r.
- 49 The charge *preteso adulterio* (appearance of adultery) carried a lesser burden of proof.

- 50 ASR GTC, Processi, xvii secolo, busta 36, f. 63v.
 51 ASR GTC, Processi, xvii secolo, busta 44, ff. 142r–149r.
 52 ASR GTC, Processi, xvii secolo, busta 17, ff. 1218r–1238r.
 53 The range of colloquial meanings for “amica” and “amorevole” was broad. Here Marino used these words to indicate friendship and affiliation, rather than romantic or sexual alliance.
 54 Cohen, “Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi,” 58–59 + n. 47.

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PART II

Sense and sensuality in sex and gender



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6

"BODILY THINGS" AND BRIDES OF CHRIST

The case of the early seventeenth-century "lesbian nun" Benedetta Carlini

Patricia Simons

On November 5, 1623, two Capuchin friars sent by a papal nuncio finished their investigation regarding whether abbess Benedetta Carlini was a valid mystic. An earlier, local study drawn up for Pescia's provost in 1619 had been amenable to her claims. In July 1620, she became the first abbess of the newly enclosed convent, a prestigious appointment that suggests belief in her story. Yet Benedetta's authority within the nunnery was not universally accepted and she lost the support of the civic establishment, leading to the new investigation by more distanced authorities. They decided that she had been deceived by the devil because, according to evidence from disaffected nuns, signs such as her stigmata were faked. New evidence also included the testimony of the abbess' assistant, Bartolomea Crivelli (often called Mea), who unexpectedly told the men, in explicit detail, about sexual relations between the two women.

Most scholars were similarly surprised when Judith Brown published the supposedly "unique" case in 1986, in *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun*.¹ Responses were varied, the lengthiest being Rudolph Bell's evaluation in 1987, which argued that the nuncio was already determined to silence Benedetta and that her subsequent lengthy imprisonment in the convent was imposed by the nuns rather than external authorities, a claim refuted by Brown.² The details of the internal, civic, and ecclesiastical power plays cannot be definitively known, but the sexual dynamics are clear. Over thirty years later, it is time to reconsider this case, neither adhering to a modernist notion of strict sexual identity nor relegating Benedetta and Mea to the margins. In keeping with Konrad Eisenbichler's ability to draw out erotic implications from literary and archival evidence, this essay respects the reality of the women's intimacy and examines textual and visual materials in order to situate them in their spiritual and sensual context. This case offers specific details and terminology for what might be called corporeal spirituality, the unequivocal coexistence of amorous language, sexual deeds, pious rhetoric, and religious faith.³

Since Benedetta's visions entailed visitations from Christ, whom she married in a public ceremony, and messages from angels such as Splenditello, in whose voice she often spoke, Brown claimed the two nuns were engaged in a heterosexualized affair:

The only sexual relations she seemed to recognize were those between men and women. Her male identity consequently allowed her to have sexual and emotional relations that she could not conceive between women. . . . In this double role of male and of angel, Benedetta absolved herself from sin and accepted her society's sexual definitions of gender.⁴

Brown's judgment associates male sex with masculine gender, and in turn a presumed dichotomy between the two women is seamlessly laminated onto their sex acts. However, this does not accord with either the women's physical actions, or with possibilities engendered by the sensual spirituality of premodern Catholicism. The souls and flesh of nuns were not as neatly divided as a later, secular view imagines.

Despite the Foucauldian point that discourses of repression can generate the very thing they seek to silence, the presumption of religious "purity" and feminized innocence has hardly disappeared. Benedetta's case remains nearly ignored in studies of European religion or is cited briefly with no new interpretation.⁵ It is seen as an aberration on two counts: she was a nun with a sex life—considered an oxymoron—and her sexual activity was with another woman—thought to be impossible in her time and setting. Documented cases of nuns having sex with clergy or secular men, as well as anti-clerical, fictional stories about such conjunctions, are taken as ordinary, natural, feminine acts by women who were supposedly frustrated in an entirely earthly way.⁶ But Benedetta, it seems, must be a "unique" case, even "bizarre," who assumed a male guise and cannot be assimilated into religious history.⁷ My point here is to remove her from the interdependent frameworks of deviance and heterosexuality, and to reintegrate her into a religious context.

Benedetta literally acted out what was usually a world of visual and imaginary culture. Here I try to reconstruct a premodern nun's agency and the imagination of religious women, who were not necessarily repressed victims with no recoverable history of any import. Nunneries were loci of social and economic power, particular inhabitants influenced secular women and male authority figures ranging from fathers to confessors, and some women like Benedetta negotiated rich emotive lives for themselves. We tend to think of nuns as women restricted by institutional confines and discourses that denied them their bodies, but Benedetta's story urges us to examine the materiality of passion, of art, and of past lives.

Only the report of the Capuchins told of Benedetta's sexual transgressions—flirting with two male priests as well as "immodest acts" with a woman—and only at the end of its account.⁸ The inquiry concluded that her visions and

ecstasies were "demonic illusions."⁹ Along with her disturbingly erotic behavior, the inquirers were concerned by their discovery that apparent signs of her special favor, the stigmata, nuptial ring, and a bleeding crucifix, were all forged. The friars integrated Carlini's sexual behavior with her spiritual behavior—all were sinful and diabolically inspired. In an important sense, we need to take this contemporary contextualization seriously, understanding that Benedetta's visions were not utterly divided from her corporeal acts. The aspiring mystic, then in her early thirties, had been having regular sex with Mea for at least two years. Neither investigation was sparked by rumors of sexual sin, nor is it clear how central that particular misconduct was to her lifelong imprisonment within the convent.¹⁰ Benedetta's story most resembles cases of what Anne Jacobson Schutte has called "failed saints," or what Inquisitors termed "pretended holiness" (*affettata santità*).¹¹ Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century penance for a nun's sexual sin ranged from expulsion or permanent incarceration in the convent to just two years of penance there.¹²

No witnesses or other evidence confirmed Mea's testimony and if she had not made a voluntary confession, no one could have uncovered the information. The demoted abbess Carlini herself renounced her past and never acknowledged Mea's claims. The unusually visible sexual aspects may not be unique. Recalling her secular life of the 1670s, and her enjoyment of men courting her, St. Veronica Giuliani later emphatically interrupted one of her autobiographies. A sentence written in capital letters alluded to imprecise errors, implicitly sexual: "I bore great tribulation for the sins I committed with those spinsters and I did not know how to confess them."¹³ Cloistered women may have enjoyed undocumented but thoroughly physical relationships in secluded spaces. From at least the twelfth to the seventeenth century, incidents of same-sex eroticism within female convents are recorded. Around 1660, nuns at Auxonne accused their mother superior of bewitching them, of wearing a dildo, of kissing, and penetrating them with fingers.¹⁴ Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women in Italian religious refuges for *convertite* (ex-prostitutes) and *malmaritate* (abused wives) became friends and in some cases nearly half the inhabitants formed couples sharing rooms, where "officials discovered women who were sexually involved with other women."¹⁵ Close living and supportive conditions also obtained in non- or semi-cloistered communities of pious laywomen.

Bell's critique of Brown usefully corrected various errors, while nevertheless making new mistakes. His chief point was that the male investigators "had no lack of imagination or conceptual framework for describing love between two women" and that it was the nuns rather than the Church officials who condemned Benedetta to life-long imprisonment.¹⁶ Certainly, she seems to have been a demanding, imperious abbess who could not cope with the dissension her rule engendered, perhaps in part due to newly instigated clausura. Brown's label of "lesbian," despite her careful acknowledgment that it was anachronistic, provoked much criticism. One reviewer of the book, using yet more historically inappropriate terms, insisted that "Carlini is heterosexual or, more properly,

bisexual in both her inclinations and conduct.”¹⁷ Disagreements over labels and details should not distract from the fundamental fact that physical, sexual contact took place between two nuns.

Too often, a series of dichotomies misinform discussions of sexual practices. A binary between the mind and the body, the soul and its vessel, is often mapped onto other seemingly concomitant divides, not only between masculine and feminine but also the celestial and the mundane. The presumption is that religious ideologies constantly repress bodily desires and only secular, putatively modern, frameworks are capable of acknowledging material passion. In a similar vein, a contrast is regularly drawn between “real sex” (whatever that is) and “Romantic Friendships” amongst women. Both the abbess’s visions and her sexual deeds were informed by conventions shaping the lives of all nuns as brides of Christ at a time when dualism was not naturalized. Discussing the exegetical tradition regarding the biblical Song of Songs as an allegory about the soul’s union with the divine, E. Ann Matter noted that the text was “the epithalamium of a spiritual union which ultimately takes place between God and the resurrected Christian—both body and soul.”¹⁸ Benedetta’s mysticism links her to a tradition of female spirituality “that made the body itself a vehicle of transcendence. . . . Corporeal images were the stuff with which nuns described their experiences.”¹⁹

Heterosexualization of the story is too simplistic, too ignorant of complex issues related to gender dynamics as well as intersex and transgender bodies. What Brown calls Benedetta’s “double role of male and of angel” and “her male identity” was not a consistent performance of masculinity. Speaking on occasion as an angel named Splenditello or as Christ, the nun was a medium for the divine rather than for her “self” in a modern sense of individual identity, and none of her contemporaries, including Mea, considered her male. During sex, neither seventeenth-century woman believed the other was transformed into a man, and their sex did not necessitate resort to “instruments” or dildos, devices that so obsessed confessors.

For two or more years, “at least three times a week,” when the women shared a cell as mistress and servant, they had sex, in the day as well as at night or in the early morning.²⁰ Although Mea sought to protect herself by claiming she was always forced, and a degree of intimidation or overbearing insistence may well have been involved, she implicitly admitted pleasure. “Embracing her,” the abbess “would put her under herself and kissing her *as if* she were a man, she would speak words of love to her. And she would stir on top of her so much that *both* of them corrupted themselves.” The women did much more than engage in what Brown and Bell describe, using the dismissive misnomer, as “mutual masturbation.”²¹ They touched each other until orgasm, in vigorous and multiple ways, including actions that were not possible for a single person, and had no need of a phallus. Rubbing or “stirring” their genitals together to the point of “corruption,” they also manually penetrated each other and actively used their mouths. Presenting herself as more passive, Mea recounted how even during the day the abbess grabbed her hand

and putting it under herself, she would have her put her finger into her genitals, and holding it there she stirred herself so much that she corrupted herself. And she would kiss her and also by force would put her own hand under her companion and her finger into her genitals and corrupted her.²²

A slightly later expansion of the account accentuated Benedetta's inventive pursuit of pleasure, saying that "to feel greater sensuality [she] stripped naked as a newborn babe," and "as many as twenty times by force she had wanted to kiss [Mea's] genitals."²³ The document, although stressing the younger woman's reluctance, also showed a comprehension of how satisfying the actions could be: "Benedetta, in order to have greater pleasure, put her face between the other's breasts and kissed them, and wanted always to be thus on her." During the day in her study, while teaching her companion to read and write, the abbess again enjoyed sensual contact, having Mea "sit down in front of her" or "be near her on her knees . . . kissing her and putting her hands on her breasts." Despite the reticence Mea tried to convey in her statement, it was clear her lover sought mutual delight. When manually arousing Mea, Benedetta "wanted her companion to do the same to her, and while she was doing this she would kiss her."

The older woman was presented as active and insistent. If Mea tried to refuse, the abbess went to the cot "and, climbing on top, sinned with her by force," or she would arouse herself ("with her own hands she would corrupt herself"). Hence, in a phrase recorded only a few times in Mea's testimony, the younger woman conceptualized her vigorous, forceful lover in standard terms, saying "she would force her into the bed and kissing her *as if* she were a man she would stir on top of her." Mea probably had no sexual experience with men, so her comparison was not based on a Freudian model of the phallus or anatomical knowledge of a penis, but on a sense of gendered roles whereby the man took a physically dominant position. Benedetta and Mea enacted substantive, varied sex, in a range of modes, positions, times, and locations.

Benedetta's case spurs us to ask questions about the management of nunneries. How did seemingly "innocent" and "repressed" women learn about sexual details and inventively contravene prohibitions? A stock opposition between knowledgeable yet repressive male authorities, and ignorant nuns without any agency, cannot satisfactorily apply. Some inhabitants of nunneries shared a degree of sexual experience and innuendo with their companions. Dedicated to God after her mother survived difficult labor in 1590, Benedetta was a nine-year-old villager when she entered the religious life.²⁴ Most other entrants (and boarders) were similarly prepubescent or in their early teens, but some were older, sexually experienced women, such as widows or former prostitutes. Heterogeneity was increased by the presence of *converse*, servants and lay sisters who entered at slightly older ages, did not profess, and sometimes frequented the outside world, although the growth of post-Tridentine enclosure made this less likely from the late sixteenth century onward. The popular and much reprinted *Colloquies* (1529) by Augustinian friar Erasmus suggested that nunneries were filled with "more

who copy Sappho's behavior (*mores*) than share her talent," and that "All the veiled aren't virgins, believe me."²⁵ Through whatever means, cloistered women could have clear ideas about how to attain sexual pleasure. An anonymous nun, literate in Latin, wrote a love poem to another religious woman in the twelfth century, noting that "when I recall how you caressed / So joyously, my little breast / I want to die."²⁶

Confessors and canonists educated women in their obsessive sense of sexual sin. Due to the urging of questioners, or to a sense of guilt that welcomed the relief of voluntary confession, Venetian Inquisitors heard in the 1660s about how the "failed saint" Antonia Pesenti fought in the nighttime against diabolic temptations to masturbate.²⁷ St. Catherine of Siena (1347–80) was tormented by sexual visions.²⁸ Such a woman, who strenuously resisted association with secular men outside her family ever since she was a girl and refused to place herself on the marriage market, nevertheless had some comprehension of the conventions of sexual sin.

Secular inspirations included farmyard sights, carnival songs, and oral jokes. Sermons, or the queries of a confessor, further embedded a degree of simple knowledge, horrifying yet fascinating. Nuns were governed by regulations suspicious of erotic activity in all-female environments, such as the provision since the early thirteenth century of night-lights to deter illicit entries into cells, regular checks on sleeping arrangements, supervision of female as well as male visitors, and careful control of the grille and other points of contact with the wider world. Yet those very rules made everyone aware of the possibility of contravention. Many penitentials and texts of canon law voiced a concern about nuns erotically touching or using "instruments" with each other, possibilities paradoxically furthered through inquiries in the confessional.²⁹

Visual culture, including widely circulated prints and paintings of the damned, was another means whereby nuns were incorporated into a communal imagination regarding both sin and sensual piety. Explicit condemnations of same-sex activities led occasionally to illustrations in religious texts or on the walls of convents.³⁰ Sensitive contact was also represented. Mutual tenderness and awe between the embracing Mary and Elizabeth at the Visitation, liturgically celebrated in the musical crescendo of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) sung every day at Vespers, was powerfully pictured by artists such as Domenico Ghirlandaio, Jacopo Pontormo, and Parmigianino (Figure 6.1).³¹ Saints' lives contained legends like Catherine of Siena suckling at Mary's breast or St. Catherine of Genoa tenderly kissing a dying woman on the mouth.³² A woman's understanding of sex and sensuality might have been based more on discursive than experiential practices, but it could seem all the more real in its visionary presence.

The chief focus of my study is legitimized, mystical eroticism in convents, leading to Benedetta's mistaken, kinetic literalization of spiritual metaphors. Her pious and sexual performances intertwined on at least three levels of efficacy. Instrumentally, her access to the divine persuaded the younger, initially illiterate Mea to be a witness to the visionary experiences and to become a sex partner.



FIGURE 6.1 Parmigianino, *Visitation*, pen and wash. Galleria Nazionale, Palazzo della Pilotta, Parma.

De Agostini Picture Library/A. DeGregorio/Bridgeman Images.

Whether the ambitious nun was a self-aware manipulator throughout, or convinced by her own delusions, is neither knowable nor particularly pertinent. For some time Mea and the other nuns, the confessor, local officials, and the townspeople were all caught up in a visionary scenario they wanted to believe. At Benedetta’s funeral in 1661, the populace had to be kept away from a body they still

thought capable of miracles.³³ The investigators eventually judged Benedetta a “poor creature” deceived by the devil, and she agreed that everything was “done without her consent or her will.”³⁴ That defense of unconscious possession was already evident during the days of her acceptance by the community, but it shifted from being divine favor and spiritual rapture to becoming demonic deception.

On the psychological level, the two women were provided with an effective way to cope with guilt. Until Mea “confessed with very great shame” about their sex, the angel Splenditello convinced her the women were not sinning.³⁵ Initially hesitating, in the presence of a host of saints led by Catherine of Siena, to obey Christ’s command to disrobe so he could place a new heart in her body, Benedetta was reassured by Jesus, who said “where I am, there is no shame.”³⁶ The Capuchin investigators thought her putative ecstasy “partook more of the lascivious than of the divine” but the earlier inquiry, and the convent’s inhabitants like Mea, had not taken it amiss. After all, Saints Catherine of Siena, Catherine de’ Ricci (1522–90), and Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi (1566–1607) received hearts from Christ, and numerous images in printed or painted form continued to disseminate this aspect of female sanctity’s typology.³⁷ Secular poetry and pictures also represented the gifting of manly hearts as a token of a courtly love that metaphorically elevated carnal desire into an idealized realm, without losing sight of erotic thrill.³⁸ Nuns were increasingly devoted to Christ’s wounded heart, and imagined their own hearts as inner loci to be entered by their heavenly groom. The crucial difference was that Benedetta’s imagination was so inventive, and her belief system so literal, that representation of her participation in this mystic ritual included physical—“lascivious”—details.

Thirdly, on the affective level, Benedetta’s mysticism heightened her sense of desire, not only for union with the divine, but for sex aided by angels. Equally, it could be said that her yearnings exacerbated her mysticism. Recourse to mystical fantasy endowed her passion with a structure and rhetoric. Rather than sublimation through piety, Benedetta’s case history indicates an intensifying of acts spiritual *and* sexual. Much of her complex psyche is summed up by the striking act of benediction she performed after sex: as Splenditello, “he made the sign of the cross all over his companion’s body after having committed many immodest acts with her.”³⁹ Priest, angel, nun, lover, guilty and grateful, powerful and placatory, Benedetta moved her hand over a body she rendered simultaneously sacral and sensual.

Alongside a renewed disciplinary zeal regulating cloistered life, Counter-Reformation culture witnessed a heightening of the emotive register of piety. In doing so, the Catholic Church accentuated a venerable, central heritage that used human bodies to imagine spiritual passions. So, in the *Mystic Nativity* of 1500–01 (National Gallery, London), Botticelli’s angels reenact the ritual of the kiss of peace, a regular liturgical moment, but potential eroticization is indicated by its conjunction with a nuptial kiss and by the exclusion of sinners from the ritual.⁴⁰ Primarily same-sex pairs kiss and embrace in Giovanni di Paolo’s mid-fifteenth-century panels representing eternal paradise (Figure 6.2).⁴¹ Angels and



FIGURE 6.2 Giovanni di Paolo, *Paradise*, 1445, tempera and gold on canvas, transferred from wood, 44.5 × 38.4 cm. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. Open access.

souls of the blessed greet each other, and the blissful unions are all manifested as moments of physical intimacy. Men in religious costume embrace, two secular women tenderly touch, near them two Dominican nuns entwine in one unit, and angels enfold men into the sweet realm of grace.

Some female mystics were blessed with a miracle of lactation.⁴² Catherine of Siena's experiences especially influenced Benedetta because her mother was devoted to Catherine and the convent was under her aegis as its patron saint.⁴³ That role model's mouth drained pus from a woman's breast and the abnegation was rewarded by what her confessor termed an “indescribable and unfathomable

liquid” flowing from Christ’s side.⁴⁴ Both scenes featured in one of the prints comprising a well-disseminated series illustrating Catherine’s life, designed by Francesco Vanni and first issued in 1597, then reissued in 1608 (Figure 6.3).⁴⁵ Her confessor Raymond of Capua presented Christ as Catherine’s sensual lover: “putting His right hand on her virginal neck and drawing her towards the wound in His own side, He whispered to her, ‘Drink, daughter, the liquid from my side, and it will fill your soul with such sweetness that its wonderful effects will be felt even by the body.’” Raymond briefly noted that an earlier confessor had written about how “the glorious Mother of God herself fills her [i.e. Catherine] with ineffable sweetness with milk from her most holy breast.”⁴⁶ Nurtured at the breasts of Christ and Mary, and moaning that “I want the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ” in church before his body fluid miraculously satisfied her so that “she thought she must die of love,” Catherine’s influential model of sanctity encouraged women such as her follower Benedetta Carlini to believe in sensate relief of their spiritual desires.⁴⁷



FIGURE 6.3 Francesco Vanni, *St. Catherine of Siena orally draining pus from an ill woman and being rewarded with liquid from Christ’s wound*, 1597, engraving, 25.7 × 28.9 cm. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum. Open access.

Benedetta's maleness supposedly derived from her role-playing as Jesus or an angel, yet neither Christ nor angels were unequivocally male. In a fundamental sense, of course, Christ was masculine, the son of God endowed with visible, male genitals to prove the infant's assumption of Incarnational humanity.⁴⁸ His adult manifestation was also primarily masculine and patriarchal. Imitative adoration of their heavenly spouse could lead to mortification and even stigmatization, but nuns were not masculinized through such actions and they did not automatically become lovers of men. Stigmatized *like* Christ or speaking at times as though Christ was delivering a message, Benedetta was not Jesus, but his bride and servant. Cloistered women were privileged followers of Mary's role as *sponsa*, the heavenly bride reenacting the Song of Songs and enjoying sensual relations with an adult, loving Christ. But when a German cleric regretfully noted that "it properly is the prerogative of his [i.e. Christ's] brides" alone to enjoy sensual union with a celestial bridegroom, he nevertheless vicariously enjoyed a homoerotic fantasy by instructing nuns to kiss Christ "for my sake."⁴⁹ As scholars have shown, in many ways the metaphorical body of Christ was "feminine" or homoerotic or, rather, polymorphous in its sensual charge.⁵⁰

Nuns imagined themselves as suckled infants, nurtured adults, mothers, spouses, female friends, all sharing an affinity as "sisters and daughters in Jesus Christ," as Catherine de' Ricci addressed a group of nuns in October 1571 after the death of "your dearest mother," their abbess.⁵¹ While Christ was their child and groom, and Mary their exemplar, nuns were also enfolded in a female genealogy of succession and a feminine household of multiple sisters, daughters and mothers. Fellow nuns tenderly support Catherine of Siena when she is so affected as to faint after receiving the stigmata, painted by Sodoma in the mid-1520s for the Sienese chapel dedicated to her within the Dominican headquarters of her cult (Figure 6.4).⁵² Catherine is shown with exemplary female acolytes whose intimate, gentle regard for her swooning body suggests a bodily care and unself-consciousness that requires no masculine intervention. Nuns took on more than one persona in this labile community of affection. After Benedetta married Christ in a special ceremony on May 26, 1619, a brief investigation did not distrust her mysticism, and on July 28, 1620 her religious sisters elected her abbess, head of the new Congregation of the Mother of God.⁵³ As such, "mother" abbess Benedetta embraced her "daughter" and fellow "sister" Mea.

Brown conflates being male with taking on an angelic guise, but Benedetta took on no such "double role of male and of angel." When using the voice of an angel, she was not adapting a role assigned to unambiguously male figures. Since theologians such as Aquinas believed angels might assume flesh but had no natural bodies or functions, the ethereal creatures were officially asexual. Names, pronouns, and visual representations implied a degree of masculinity about God's messengers, but often of a childlike or pubescent and androgynous kind. At the very moment when Gabriel carried the message transmitting the Logos into the body of the Virgin Mary, that archangel was often depicted as especially androgynous. It was probably to a frescoed Gabriel that the orphan,



FIGURE 6.4 Sodoma, Giovanni Antonio Bazzi, *Scenes from the Life of Saint Catherine of Siena: The swooning of the saint*, 1526, fresco. Siena, S. Domenico. Scala/Art Resource, NY.

later Beata, Vanna of Orvieto pointed on a church wall when she said “this angel is my mother.”⁵⁴ Splenditello and Benedetta’s other angels empowered rather than masculinized her. Splenditello and company were celestial, barely gendered embodiments of winged *eros* or desire, rather than of a particular lover.

Mea’s account moved directly from details of their sex to the statement that the mystic “always appeared to be in a trance (*ecstasi*) . . . Her angel, Splenditello, did these things, appearing as a beautiful youth (*bellissimo giovane*) of fifteen years.”⁵⁵ The attractive adolescent was endowed with the kind of homoerotic potential celebrated in contemporary paintings such as Caravaggio’s *The Stigmatization of St. Francis* produced in the first decade of the seventeenth century (Figure 6.5).⁵⁶ Like the contemporaneous Splenditello, the seraphic spirit of celestial love who gently supports Francis is a creature ostensibly male but fundamentally symbolic of an eroticism which does not insist on singular identifications of gender or sex. The saint swoons in the arms of a lover whose pictorial form embodies the ineffable and polymorphous. Francis’s pious identification with the supreme exemplar Christ is physically and metaphorically consummated as he receives the stigmata in a mystical experience necessarily represented in erotic terms.

A little more than twenty years after Mea’s confession, Gianlorenzo Bernini began work on a three-dimensional figuration of *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (Figure 6.6). With caressing gaze, divine light, a conventional arrow of Love, and



FIGURE 6.5 Caravaggio, *Saint Francis receiving the stigmata*, ca. 1595–96, oil on canvas, 94 × 130 cm. Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art.

Photo credit: Nimatallah/Art Resource, NY.



N.º 6193 Roma - Chiesa di S. Maria della Vittoria. Santa Teresa in estasi, gruppo del Bernini. F.lli Alinari 1935

FIGURE 6.6 Bernini, *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa*, marble, 1645–52. Rome, S. Maria della Vittoria.

Photo credit: Alinari/Art Resource, NY.

delicate gestures, Bernini's embodiment of celestial spirit visits upon Teresa an experience of divine transport. A childlike member of the ranks of the cherubim gently strips Teresa of her worldly garments, lifting the robe so that blissful fire will sear her soul with what she called "a point of fire. This he plunged into my heart several times so that it penetrated to my entrails."⁵⁷ As Teresa described her rapture in the early 1560s, "this is not a physical, but a spiritual pain, though the body has some share in it—even a considerable share." Corporeal sensation was certainly perceived by an anonymous critic who, around 1670, accused Bernini of having "dragged that most pure Virgin not only into the Third Heaven, but into the dirt, to make a Venus not only prostrate but prostituted."⁵⁸ Contemporaries, in other words, were quite aware of the fine line between sensuality and spirituality, a boundary crossed not only by Benedetta but by the renowned artist Bernini.

Benedetta's staging of such favors as her stigmatization and her nuptials with Christ were eroticized events akin to those depicted by artists. She involved an entire community of nuns and a local populace in earthly manifestations of the divine, just as Caravaggio did in oil paint, Bernini in marble, or preachers with words. Miracles were understood to be physically manifest, and visions subtly brought the divine into the corporeal realm. The late thirteenth-century mystic Gertrude of Helfta wondered why God "had instructed her with so corporeal a vision." Her question was rhetorical, as any acceptable mystic knew:

spiritual and invisible things can only be explained to the human intellect by means of similitudes of things perceived by the mind. And that is why no one ought to despise what is revealed by means of bodily things, but ought to study anything that would make the mind worthy of tasting the sweetness of spiritual delights by means of the likeness of bodily things (*corporaliū rerum*).⁵⁹

As the seamstress and "failed saint" Angela Mellini knew about her visions in the 1690s, "one never sees things with the eyes of the body, but everything is seen intellectually."⁶⁰ On the other hand, this reassuring statement was delivered to an Inquisitor, whereas a note written by her halting hand understood that emotional passion had very real effects. Thinking of such things as the pains she suffered in her heart, in imitation of Christ's passion, she observed that "love makes me experience the truth of sufferings through the senses, now it beats, now it purges, now it hurts and now all sorts of torments are felt." In order to truly convey the exactitude and reality of her sensate love, in September 1697 she sketched a diagram of her wounded heart, complete with lance, nails, hammer, cross, and crown of thorns. That drawing was produced for her confessor, a man she desired so much that she felt "great heat in all the parts of my body and particularly of movements in my genitals."⁶¹ Like a courtier offering a heart to the beloved, and like the related love-imagery for the soul's yearning after the divine, Angela availed herself of religious rhetoric and resorted to physical signs when loving

Christ and wooing her priest. Similarly, on Caravaggio's canvas and in Bernini's chapel, light is divine *and* natural, the ecstasy spiritual *and* embodied. So, too, Benedetta's sensate and emotive life was a continuous blend of illusion and reality, spirit, and similitude.

Echoing her model, Catherine of Siena, Benedetta experienced visions, stigmatization, the exchange of hearts, and a marriage with Christ. Catherine's reception into heaven after her death, disseminated in Francesco Vanni's engravings and various paintings, entailed a tender, intercessory greeting by Mary.⁶² Catherine's charitable nursing brought her mouth into contact with one dying woman's breast (Figure 6.3), and on another occasion she transformed an ill woman into her spouse.⁶³ "Full of burning charity," Catherine rushed to the hospital to tend a bereft woman, "embraced her, and offered to help her and look after her for as long as she liked." She motivated herself by "looking upon this leper woman, in fact, as her Heavenly Bridegroom." Benedetta took the actions of her exemplar further, embracing another woman in a relationship where each was a spouse, each a bride. At some level, she perhaps believed the words God spoke to Catherine, that "In my eyes there is neither male nor female."⁶⁴

To have an impact, mysticism had to present a degree of spectacle, and thus cross into the physical realm. The special favors bestowed on some mystics were invisible, but then other signs had to appear, especially as the Church grew more cautious about legitimizing local cults, feminine excesses, fakery, and piety which might turn out to be diabolical in origin. Lucia Broccadelli's stigmata arrived during Lent in 1496 but only becoming visible at Easter, after Catherine of Siena's supplication in heaven persuaded Christ "that the stigmata should be visible and palpable in me."⁶⁵ For several years, the Dominican visionary was highly favored by the lord of Ferrara, Ercole d'Este, and officials, including the Pope's physician, examined her wounds to their satisfaction. But the fortunes of this "living saint" suffered a reversal when her ducal patron died in 1505. The sisters, chafing under her strict rule, were able to mount a counter-offensive because the stigmata had disappeared. Lucia was imprisoned for fraud within the convent for nearly forty years, until she died in 1544. A potential mystic impressing only a relatively small town and without a powerful supporter, Carlini also encountered a backlash from her fellow religious and was investigated in an even more stringent climate.

Once the Counter-Reformation took hold, especially after the Council of Trent (1545–63), there was an increase in cases of women ultimately judged "failed saints" or diabolically possessed. Concomitantly, the number of female canonizations decreased, with a suspicion of women deemed credulous and excessive further abetted by Urban VIII's more strict procedures for canonization.⁶⁶ Two hundred years earlier, Catherine of Siena's confessor, Raymond of Capua, later Master General of the Dominican Order, was persuaded of the veracity of her mystical experiences, despite the invisibility of her marriage ring and stigmata, by "watching the movements of her body when she was in ecstasy."⁶⁷ Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi begged Christ that her mystical ring and

stigmata be invisible, but the impulse for humility was neatly balanced by kinetic and audible theatre similar to Catherine's. Her very wish not to be singled out became itself part of the record collected by her community.

In May 1619, Benedetta staged an elaborate wedding witnessed by the secular elite of Pescia. The first inquiry into her holiness began the very next day. But her renewal of the ring (with saffron) and stigmata (with a large pin) only emerged in the course of the later investigation.⁶⁸ Judged fraudulent by Bell, Benedetta may nevertheless have been acting in good faith, marking her body artificially only when doubts grew, trying to persuade the sceptics by secondary, external signs that she truly believed were there on her soul.⁶⁹ When a Capuchin nun, the blessed Maria Maddalena Martinengo (1687–1737), piously took a needle to her own body, it was not counted diabolical. She embroidered the instruments of the Passion "with the needle threaded with silk . . . into her own flesh, nice and big, as chalice-covers are embroidered, nor without bleeding."⁷⁰ To retain her status and stem the tide of opposition in an increasingly fractious convent, Benedetta may have inscribed her body without thinking that the act was forgery. Self-mutilation recurs in the lives of mystics, including Angela of Foligno's searing of her genitals, Margaret of Cortona's desire to cut her face, and Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi's gouging of her flesh.⁷¹ Benedetta's piercing, documented by a hostile witness who came forth only after the convent turned against their imperious abbess, may have been motivated in part by a genuine element of *imitatio Christi*. Rather than judge her by later standards of verisimilitude and honesty, it would be more appropriate to understand her actions, and subsequent downfall, as a naïve, over-literal, and undisguised performance of spiritual conventions that found no meaningful political support amongst higher authorities or in a discordant convent.

Like other aspirants to mysticism, Benedetta displayed her celestial vision through mime, "motioning with her hands as if she were taking" souls out of purgatory, for instance, but her choreography went so far as to publicly process in a prearranged mystic marriage, and to act out her erotic drive with Mea.⁷² Maria Maddalena de' Pazzi also kinetically staged her exceptionality. She mimed her wedding with Christ, or in pantomime indicated to the novices under her care that she was being stigmatized. Her charges reported that "she held her hands open, staring at a figure of Jesus that she had on top of her bedstead; she *looked like* St. Catherine of Siena. So, we thought that at that point Jesus gave her his holy stigmata."⁷³ Eroticizing a dormitory, looking at one image and mimicking another, Maria Maddalena involved her young female audience in a highly visual fantasy that drew on widely familiar iconography of female mysticism.

Those visualizations were further instilled through skills of internalized sight. Trained, like all Catholics, in contemplative techniques merging the inner and outer eye, Maria Maddalena and her faithful novices witnessed the material reality of a vision. Meditative practices imagined narratives set in contemporary settings, with familiar faces, placing a premium on immediacy and recognition that was also highly valued in visual culture. Visions were regularly made tangible,

when nuns cared for and dressed dolls of the Christ Child, acted out the stigmatization, wrote and performed religious plays, or, in Catherine of Bologna's case, painted and drew images inspired by her raptures.⁷⁴ To make fantasy real, to don the mantle of holy figures, was orthodox rather than perverse.

Benedetta's concrete sexualization of her religious scenario was not unique. In the early sixteenth century, a Spanish canon lawyer had justified his inordinate lust for some nuns in Rome by arguing that since, as a cleric "he was the bridegroom of the Church and the nuns were brides of the Church," they could have "carnal relations without sin."⁷⁵ Imprisoned until he renounced these beliefs, the educated man had muddled certain doctrines, but his conflation of spiritual allegory and physical desire was present in the writings of many a mystic and it was visualized in numerous visions or works of art. By making her desires earthly as well as divine, Benedetta misunderstood conventions, but she did not invent outside a context. While she cannot be posited as a mainstream example of pre-modern religiosity, there was a logic to Benedetta's actions that does not rely on a reading of her as a skeptical, manipulative fraud.

Angelic disguise transformed the mystic aspirant Benedetta into a forceful seductress, whose tenderness and ecstatic passion was not rigidly fixed along differently sexed lines. Mea reported:

This Splenditello called her his beloved; . . . [and said] I assure you that there is no sin in it; and while we did these things he said many times: give yourself to me with all your heart and soul and then let me do as I wish.⁷⁶

Like the facilitating angel in the mystic encounters represented by Caravaggio and Bernini, Benedetta's guardian angel was imagined as a beautiful, curly-haired youth dressed in gold and white.⁷⁷ The young angel was an instrument of persuasion, the abbess a figure of command and intimidation. Splenditello's power derived from a patriarchal hierarchy in heaven, but he sounded like a youth rather than a god. His counterpart in Caravaggio's painting does not heterosexualize that encounter; and in Bernini's ensemble the young angel eroticizes a spiritual ecstasy that cannot be crudely reduced to phallic penetration by an adult man. Nor does Splenditello's presence amidst the couplings of Benedetta and Mea reduce them to a differently sexed twosome. There was a third, disembodied protagonist in each of these raptures. The divine was elemental light in Caravaggio's painting and Bernini's sculpture. In Benedetta's visions, as in her sex with Mea, the divine was literally articulated, through voice. Christ or Splenditello was a pivot in a triangulation of desire in which one of the results was frequent, very real sex between two women.⁷⁸

The interpretation of Benedetta's acts within the framework of a heterosexualized bride of Christ points to the need to reconsider in quite what ways Jesus was a spouse. Three kinds of marital imagery informed the regulation of female religious: liturgical, allegorical, and mystical. While all nuns were incorporated liturgically and could picture their souls as allegorical spouses of the heavenly

bridegroom, only mystics experienced additional nuptials. In 1619, Benedetta’s mystic marriage was an overt, preplanned, public festival, as was her first marriage to Christ in 1599 at the age of nine, taking the veil, ring, and crown at a ceremony celebrated by a bishop, though occasionally the celebrant was an abbess.⁷⁹ In a drawing by an anonymous German nun around 1500, enthroned Virgin Mary/*Ecclesia* replaces the priest (Figure 6.7).⁸⁰

Strikingly, the figure of Christ, particularly as an adult, is absent from many such images. When he does appear, as in an illuminated manuscript of the rule of St. Benedict produced for Venetian nuns, he can bestow the nuptial crown on two Brides at once.⁸¹ Describing the ritual as one involving “the giving of a woman to a man” and using the term “heavenly husband” mistakenly suggests a scenario akin to a modern, secular, nuclear family.⁸² Analogy should not be confused with actuality. The acculturation entailed complex, multiple interchanges, evident in the drawing (Figure 6.7). Its scroll carries the inscription “Take this boy and take care of [i.e. suckle] me (nutri michi). I will give you your reward.”⁸³ Like a priest offering the veil, ring, and crown, and then the eucharist, the Virgin begins to speak, licensing the earthly virgin to embrace the baby. But the infant takes over, urging the young nun to suckle him and promising her eternal reward. Her spouse is an infant, not a dominant patriarch, nor an earthly “husband.” Christ was a communal groom, and a commonly nurtured babe.

He was more visible, and more often adult, in images of the allegorical and mystical levels of marriage.⁸⁴ Mystic marriages of *saints* show the adult, or often infant, Christ as the pivotal locus of mediation, yet the rhetoric and ritual of marriage also visually and symbolically bonds two or more female characters



FIGURE 6.7 Anonymous German nun, *Consecration of Virgins*, ca. 1500.

Photo credit: Jeffrey Hamburger. Used with permission

who are devoted to God's son. Catherine of Siena imitated St. Catherine of Alexandria's mystic marriage with Christ, and thereafter the subject of union became popular.⁸⁵ Female saints, especially the earlier Catherine, are usually depicted in the act of espousal to an infant Christ offered by his mother Mary, just as the German nun remembered (Figure 6.7). Thereby, two holy women engineer a mystical union over the body of a small child. To say that Christ becomes "the object of exalted maternal instincts rather than sublimated sexual desire," however, is to assume that a nurturing woman's affection has no component of passion, and that all female desire must be focused on a male object.⁸⁶

The child-groom can be shown as a young, unknowing instrument guided by his mother, as in a painting by Correggio, where the interplay of hands is particularly sensitive.⁸⁷ Courtly decorum amongst adults becomes in Correggio's visualization an intimate, gentle affair in which the child is too young to grant seigneurial permission. Held close so that his body is subsumed in his mother's, at other times he is a virtual extension of her body, helping to connect through compositional line and symbolic gesture a succession of two or more female figures. His small arms and shoulder stand in for Mary's left arm in a later painting by Ludovico Carracci, so that his torso becomes especially symbolic of a presence that almost need not be there.⁸⁸ Guercino's painting of 1620 depicts a gentle touch between the two women, and tender glances link the three characters, but Christ is relegated to the opposite side.⁸⁹

Visual management of nuns' fantasies could imagine them in very physical, explicit actions. A cycle on the Song of Songs painted in the mid-fourteenth century on the walls of a nun's gallery at Chelmno in eastern Prussia imagined *Sponsa* eagerly pulling her spouse into her bedchamber.⁹⁰ It literalizes the Canticle: "I will seize you and lead you / into the house of my mother" (8:2). Such pictures made manifest an emotive intensity that the all-female audience knew they were meant to share with other women.⁹¹ In Northern Europe, the instructional habit of elaborating the amorous interchange between Christ and the soul produced a sequential narrative version illustrated in comic-strip fashion, *Christus und die minnende Seele* (Christ and the loving soul), written in German in the late fourteenth century, later disseminated in printed sheets and books.⁹² The divine lover embraced the soul, wooed her with music, and crowned her in a ritual reminiscent of a wedding ceremony. She obeyed Christ's command to divest herself of worldly garments when he said "If you wish to serve me, you must be stripped bare."

It is unlikely that Italian nuns like Benedetta knew this particular text or its imagery, but the practice of encouraging a religious woman's fantasy through narrative, whether in sermons, sung words, wall paintings, prints, books, or paintings, fostered a widespread, eroticized imagination. The soul's rapturous reach toward its divine lover from a supine position on a bed, as represented in the Rothschild Canticles, was echoed in Bernini's marble display of Ludovica Albertoni arching up from a bed where the disarranged sheets are even more telling a sign of the soul's ecstasy.⁹³ Within this ideological structure, Benedetta

Carlini could imagine herself as a privileged soul experiencing ecstatic union with the actual body of Mea.

On one of the three occasions when she addressed Mea in Christ's voice, "he said he wanted her to be his bride, and he was content that she give him her hand; and she did this thinking it was Jesus."⁹⁴ Even if the abbess was a manipulative faker, as a crude and cynical reading might have it, Mea believed the illusion, according to her self-protective testimony. If neither woman was skeptical at the time of the conversation, then the words and gesture performed a tangible, if unconventional, enactment of bridal mysticism. Christ was manifest in a human—and female—body rather than only present to the mind's eye, yet the two believers went on with the corporeal pantomime. If one or both of the earthly players *did* think that Christ was not speaking, then at least one of them heard a marriage proposal being offered by one woman to another yet did not rebuff or denounce it at the time.

Benedetta utilized the traditional metaphors and scenarios of erotic mysticism, but at certain moments she took the logic beyond doctrinal limits. She only assumed Jesus' voice during three conversations with Mea.⁹⁵ Twice she spoke "before doing these dishonest things," first when Jesus took Mea's hand and suggested marriage. The second time was in the choir, "holding [Mea's] hands together and telling her that he forgave her all her sins." "The third time it was after [Mea] was disturbed by these goings on," and was reassured that there was no sinfulness, and that Benedetta "while doing these things had no awareness of them." All three occasions offered comfort and framed sex, occurring either before or after their "immodest acts," but Benedetta did not present herself as a sexually active Christ. However much bridal mysticism structured Benedetta's actions, she never took on the persona of Christ during sex with Mea, instead acting through an angel when she used any guise at all.

Perhaps she is best described as a mystic playwright, someone who wrote scripts during visionary or ecstatic experiences but who acted out rather than wrote down the dramas, for an audience that included not only Mea but also on occasion the other nuns and the local populace. Plays by nuns were performed by inmates who cross-dressed for the male roles.⁹⁶ In 1553 Caterina de' Ricci played the part of twelve-year-old Jesus speaking, with "signs of particular love," lines from the Song of Songs to a fellow nun who was acting as St. Agnese.⁹⁷ Taking multiple roles, such as Christ or angels with a variety of dialects and ages, as well as *sponsa* and *anima*, Benedetta was a consummate performer whose voice and appearance fitted the occasion.⁹⁸

The mutual gestures of Benedetta and Mea literally followed the Song of Songs: "My beloved put forth his hand through the hole / and my belly trembled at his touch / I rose to open to my beloved / my hands dripped myrrh / . . . / I opened the bolt of the door to my love" (5:4–6). Mea's account of how Benedetta "put her face between the other's breasts and kissed them, and wanted always to be thus on her" recalls the Canticle's enjoyment too. In the adaptation of the biblical Song in the Rothschild manuscript compiled for a nun, *Sponsus* delights

in breasts: “between my breasts he will abide . . . Behold my beloved speaketh to me: How beautiful are thy breasts, thy breasts are more beautiful than wine.”⁹⁹ The phrase “sister my bride (*soror mea sponsa*)” was particularly apt. It occurs four times in the Song (4:9, 10, 12; 5:1), along with “open to me, my sister my friend” (*sor mea amica mea*) (5:2).

Imitating the soul’s statement in *Christus und die minnende Seele* that “I must go completely naked,” Benedetta “stripped naked as a newborn babe.” Each recalled the Song’s bride: “I have taken off my garment” (5:3). The sequential narrative of the romance between Christ and the soul also had the womanly soul say “I cannot read a book unless you are my master” and “I will tell no-one, love, what I have heard from you,” each lines Mea could have uttered to her abbess.¹⁰⁰ Benedetta spoke another line, taking on the voice of Christ to offer the symbolic emblem of mystical marriage: “Since you delight me, love, I set a crown upon you.” She lay on top of Mea, “kissing her as if she were a man [and] she would stir on top of her so much that both of them corrupted themselves,” an arrangement, and finale, which bears comparison with the miraculous levitation experienced by the Capuchin nun Maria Domitilla in Pavia at the very same time, 1622. She recorded that Christ

united his most blessed head to my unworthy one, his most holy face to mine, his most holy breast (petto) to mine, his most holy hands to mine, and his most holy feet to mine, and thus all united to me so very tightly, he took me with him onto the cross . . . I felt myself totally aflame with the most sweet love of this most sweet Lord.¹⁰¹

Benedetta’s models, such as the *sponsa*, the *anima*, and Catherine of Siena, were feminine, metaphorical, or legendary, and her mistake in dogma was to take the symbolic literally. Benedetta acted as though the material *was* the spiritual: stripping for Christ or Mea like an obedient and pleased soul in the Northern sequential romance; kissing a woman or suckling at a breast as did certain female mystics or saints; engaging in mutual, manual penetration of an orifice in line with the Song of Songs; proposing and performing marriage as though she could take both roles in a mystical drama.

Her sex partner, Mea, was always a female figure, assigned a feminine part. Benedetta enjoyed repeated sex with a woman, not because that was the only body available to her, but because their religious beliefs were not predicated upon some exclusionary, modern notion of heterosexual identity. Through the vicissitudes of confession and documentary survival, we happen to know that in the early 1620s two under-educated women in a provincial Tuscan convent took religiously legitimized and visualized passion to a literal level. Brides of Christ, nurtured on the notion that their cells were bedchambers for nuptial union with a shared, metaphorical spouse, became in those very spaces lovers on an earthly plane. In seventeenth-century Pescia a patriarchal logic led to an alternative rite of passion. This does not mean that the women’s sexual arousal was incidental

or insignificant, but that their sensual and spiritual inspirations were neither entirely insincere nor irreligious. Benedetta Carlini was a nun, abbess, articulate angel, feminized soul, female mystic, and woman's lover.

Notes

- 1 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 4; Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality," with "virtually unique" on 487, Brown's response, 503–09, and Bell's reply, 510–11. I am grateful to Professor Bell for sharing his microfilms of the documents. The Italian of two missing frames, his figs. 1 and 2, was partly published in the Italian edition of Brown's book, *Atti impuri*, esp. 184–86. I will endeavor to place digital copies of the documents in the Deep Blue repository of the University of Michigan. Ideas here were first explored in a talk at the University of Michigan (January 2000). I am grateful for everyone's attention in numerous audiences since then, but for conversations I especially thank Louise Marshall and Vanessa Lyon.
- 2 Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality," 501–2, Brown's response, *Immodest Acts*, 507.
- 3 Partner, "Did Mystics Have Sex?" 296–311; Salih, "When is a Bosom," 14–32.
- 4 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 127.
- 5 An exception is Matter, "Discourses of Desire," 119–31.
- 6 Documented cases include Brucker, ed., *The Society of Renaissance Florence*, 206–12; Chambers and Pullan, with Fletcher, eds., *Venice. A Documentary History*, 204–05, 208.
- 7 Matter, "Discourses of Desire", 122–23: "the nature of Benedetta Carlini's sexual encounters with her sister nun is so bizarre as to defy our modern categories of 'sexual identity.'"
- 8 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 161–64.
- 9 Ibid., 110–14, 160–64; Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality," 491.
- 10 Carlini's imprisonment "in penitence" ended when she died in August 1661: *ibid.*, 132. Upon Mea's death in September 1660, the recorder referred to Benedetta's fraud rather than sexual deeds: when Benedetta "was engaged in those deceits" Mea "was her companion and was always with her." But Mea was not imprisoned: *ibid.*, 135.
- 11 Jacobson Schutte, "*Per Speculum in Enigmate*," 187, 195 n. 11. For another case see Ciammitti, "One Saint Less."
- 12 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 7–8, 136; Rosa, "The Nun," 221; Velasco, *Lesbians in Early Modern Spain*, 92.
- 13 Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, 70.
- 14 Barstow, *Witchcraze*, 72, and further cases, 139–41. Others include Velasco, *Lesbians in Early Modern Spain*, 113–24.
- 15 Cohen, *The Evolution of Women's Asylums*, 92–93, 208–09 n. 65.
- 16 Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality," 498.
- 17 Cervigni, "Immodest Acts," 286.
- 18 Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved*, 142.
- 19 Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles*, 4.
- 20 Unless otherwise indicated, quotations are from Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 117–18, 120–22, 162–64 *passim* (with emphases added).
- 21 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 120; Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality," 486, 495, 497, 499.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., 498 ("le ha voluto baciare le parti pudente"); Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 120.
- 24 Ibid., 21–22, 27–28.
- 25 *Collected Works of Erasmus*, vol. 39: *Colloquies*, 290.
- 26 Coote, ed., *The Penguin Book of Homosexual Verse*, 118–21 for this and another example.
- 27 Schutte, "*Per Speculum in Enigmate*," 192.
- 28 Raymond of Capua, *Life of St Catherine of Siena*, 91–93.
- 29 Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, 43, 61, 99, 102, 138–39, 149–50, 172 n. 136.

- 30 For a female couple sinning sexually in a *Bible Moralisée* of c. 1220, see Camille, *The Medieval Art of Love*, 138–39, fig. 125. For the 1468 fresco of the *Inferno* situated in an upper room of the convent founded by St. Francesca Romana, with a couple of indeterminate sex, but probably male, lying side by side on the lowest (and most easily seen) register, see Bartolomei Romagnoli, *Santa Francesca Romana*, Pl. 27.
- 31 Ghirlandaio's panel is in the Louvre, Pontormo's remains in Carmignano.
- 32 See n. 43 below; Jorgensen, "Love Conquers All," 102–03.
- 33 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 137; Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality," 502.
- 34 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 108, 129, 130.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 163–64.
- 36 *Ibid.*, 63, 158, with subsequent quotations from 107, 117, 164.
- 37 Raymond of Capua, *Life of St Catherine*, 165–67; Kaftal, *St Catherine in Tuscan Painting*, 72–77; Bianchi and Giunta, *Iconografia di Santa Caterina da Siena*, 112–14 and *passim*; Maggi, *Uttering the Word*, 176 n. 15; Vandenbroeck, et al., *Le Jardin clos de l'ame*, nos. 147, 169; Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 63–64.
- 38 Camille, *Medieval Art of Love*, 111–19, and *passim*, including figs. 19, 55, 80.
- 39 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 163.
- 40 Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, 105; McNeill and Gamer, eds., *Medieval Handbooks of Penance*, 81, 152. When Ercole d'Este married Renée of France in Paris in June 1528, at the Pax they kissed each other: Gardner, *The King of Court Poets*, 194.
- 41 The quotation is from Rosa, "Nun," 222. A detail of embracing Dominican women from the panel in Siena's Pinacoteca appears on the cover of Brown's book.
- 42 Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 101, 126, 131–32, 157, 165–80, 270–73, and *passim*.
- 43 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 26, 41.
- 44 Raymond of Capua, *Life of St Catherine*, 141, 147–48 (hereafter quoted from 148).
- 45 Marciari and Boorsch, *Francesco Vanni*, 118–27.
- 46 Raymond of Capua, *Life of St Catherine*, 179.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 170–71.
- 48 Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ*.
- 49 Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 390.
- 50 Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*; Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*.
- 51 St. Catherine de' Ricci, *Selected Letters*, 39 (no. 47). Subsequent quotations come from Letters 19, 46.
- 52 For the frescoes by Sodoma and an earlier one by Andrea Vanni in the same church see Riedl and Seidel, *Die Kirchen von Siena*, II, pt. 2, pls. VII, 596, 627–28 (and pl. 276 for Rutilio Manetti's canvas of 1630).
- 53 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 41.
- 54 Frugoni, "Female Mystics, Visions, and Iconography," 139.
- 55 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 163, a translation here adjusted according to the cropped photograph of the passage in Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality," 501 (fig. 2), because Brown conflates the information on Splenditello and on another angel Radicello (a *fanciullo*) aged eight or nine. The common misperception is thus that Splenditello was a boy.
- 56 Gregori, "Caravaggio Today," no. 68.
- 57 Teresa of Ávila, *The Life of Saint Teresa of Ávila*, 210 (ch. 29).
- 58 Bauer, ed., *Bernini in Perspective*, 53.
- 59 Hamburger, *Rothschild Canticles*, 165–66; Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary*, 147.
- 60 Ciammitti, "One Saint Less," 149.
- 61 *Ibid.*, 150–52, fig. 3.
- 62 Bianchi and Giunta, *Iconografia*, nos. 43, 438, p. 126.
- 63 Raymond of Capua, *Life of St Catherine*, 131, 133.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 108–09. During her visionary union with God, the medieval mystic Hadewijch noted that God "lost that manly beauty" so that he dissolved and "then it was to me as if we were one without difference": Bynum, *Holy Feast*, 156.
- 65 Gardner, *Dukes and Poets in Ferrara*, 366–81, 401–05, 431–32, 464–67, 562.

- 66 Weinstein and Bell, *Saints and Society*, 141–42, 220–38; Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, 151, 170–71.
- 67 Raymond of Capua, *Life of St Catherine*, 100, 175–6.
- 68 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 160.
- 69 Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality," 493.
- 70 Rosa, "Nun," 201–02.
- 71 Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, 99, 107, 175, with other cases passim; Tibbetts Schulenburg, "The Heroics of Virginity," 29–72.
- 72 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 159.
- 73 Maggi, *Uttering the Word*, 34 (my emphasis).
- 74 On Catherine of Bologna see Wood, *Women, Art and Spirituality*.
- 75 Weyer, *De praestiis daemonum*, 184–85.
- 76 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 163; Bell, "Renaissance Sexuality," fig. 2.
- 77 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 64–65, 122.
- 78 On erotic triangulation, see the classic study Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men*, esp. Ch. 1.
- 79 Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, 56–61, 240 nn. 125–26; Lowe, "Secular Brides and Convent Brides," esp. 43; Vandenbroeck, et al., *Le Jardin clos de l'ame*, nos. 168, 172.
- 80 Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, Pl. 7.
- 81 Lowe, "Secular Brides and Convent Brides," fig. 3.
- 82 The phrases are in *ibid.*, which often uses "heavenly husband" and has the other phrase on 44. But at 56ff she points out how often Christ is absent from images, although the essay's point is to suggest parallels between the secular and religious ceremonies.
- 83 Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, 56–58.
- 84 Vandenbroeck, et al., *Le Jardin clos de l'ame*, nos. 148, 178 and fig. 106a; Hamburger, *Rothschild Canticles*, 113–15.
- 85 Raymond of Capua, *Life of St Catherine*, 99–101, explicitly noting the antecedent with "another Catherine, a martyr and queen."
- 86 Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists*, 57, 239 n. 118.
- 87 Ekserdjian, *Correggio*, 137–38.
- 88 Emiliani and Feigenbaum, *Ludovico Carracci*, no. 1. In Parmigianino's red chalk drawing of the subject for an altarpiece, c. 1523–24, the Child does not appear at all: Franklin, *The Art of Parmigianino*, 104–06.
- 89 Stone, *Guercino*, 84 n. 62.
- 90 Hamburger, *Rothschild Canticles*, 85–87, fig. 156 (and see fig. 159); Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary*, 409–10, fig. 8.5.
- 91 Wood, *Women, Art and Spirituality*, 128ff, 252 n. 31, 253 n. 37.
- 92 Gebauer, "Christus und Die Minnende Seele. Both nuns and secular women were readers.
- 93 Hamburger, *Rothschild Canticles*, 106–10, 155–62, f. 66r (Pl. 7); Perlove, *Bernini and the Idealization*. Bernini's motives included wanting to atone for his brother Luigi sodomizing a boy in St. Peter's (13–14).
- 94 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 163.
- 95 *Ibid.*, 163–64.
- 96 Weaver, "Spiritual Fun," 177, 181–83.
- 97 Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, 194–96.
- 98 Splenditello spoke in three dialects: Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 160.
- 99 Hamburger, *Rothschild Canticles*, 82, 179, cf. Song of Songs 1:1, 1:12, 4:5, 4:10, 7:3, 7, 8, 12, 8:1, 10.
- 100 Kunzle, *History of the Comic Strip*, vol. 1, 23.
- 101 Brown, *Immodest Acts*, 162; Matter, "Interior Maps," 64–65.

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7

IN BED WITH LUDOVICO SANTA CROCE (1557)

Thomas V. Cohen

Let us take two tawdry events, male affronts to women, with social history's eye to assets, both cultural and material, and to the subtle exchanges that bound men to men, women to women, and one gender to the other. This is social history in nearly-literary mode, keen to read texts closely. We have text of two kinds—first the words on paper provided by a small tangle of criminal trials. If not the actual words spoken before and by the court or in the streets, taverns, and brothels, still these records do come close. The conventions and imperatives of the court itself, and the imperfect scribal hand have, as always, refracted actual speech, but the Roman-legal habits of verbatim transcription still offer material for close, thoughtful reading. Second comes the fabric of the city itself, for our scoundrel and his allies prowled and enjoyed their small corner of Rome, with its streets, squares, and assorted monuments, an urban backdrop and firm anchorage for memories. The urbanscape, so prominent both in what happened and in the telling, in itself invites a reading no less close than the one we accord words on paper.

So, before turning to the deeds, note the spaces where they took place. We are in Rome's Rione Regola, or Arenula, a zone sometimes little changed from the 1550s and 1560s of our stories. Nevertheless, the urbanism of first united Italy and then the Duce made drastic alterations. In the later 1880s, the wide Via Arenula ripped inwards from the Tiber, obliterating a web of streets and squares, and demolishing the church and convent of Santa Anna, right under the grand 1890 apartment where I once lived and wrote. The church survives only in the names of Via Santa Anna, and of a pleasant trattoria whose menu depicts my own abode. A second nineteenth-century destruction obliterated the ghetto, replacing it with a grand synagogue and some lumpish buildings. And then, under Mussolini, nostalgia for the Caesars erased the medieval fabric around the fish market at Pescheria, reducing tight neighborhoods to sterile archeology.

So, to trace our scoundrel and his entourage, we must fall back on the old maps, especially the splendidly accurate Nolli Plan of 1747, and read street plans, the surviving urban fabric, and words in court, together.

The Nolli plan shows how, from 1555, once the ghetto gates went up, a street our witnesses call the *strada dritta* became crucial for mobility, especially at night. It is hard today to recapture that very ancient urban street, today the Via del Portico d'Ottavia. Down by the old ghetto, it is now so wide that restaurants sprawl into it to hawk *carciofi alla giudia*, and, on their Sabbath, Rome's Jews gather after services for a great *chiacchiera*—communal conversation. Further north, Via Arenula and the unkempt park in Piazza Cairolì, and a vague piazza before the baroque facade of San Carlo, have all smudged the profile of this street, which, in the sixteenth century, was no less tight than straight. Moreover, it was handy, skirting the ghetto to link the fishmongers' square at Pescheria to Piazza Giudia. It then passed the palace of the Santa Croce, Renaissance in spirit but, like Palazzo Venezia, still half-medieval in shape, with an ornamental square tower today lopped short. The Santa Croce, banished by Sixtus IV, had lost their houses; readmitted, they threw up this palace, with its elegant diamond-studding on the wall. As the Nolli map shows, heading northwest, the street, at a *bivio* (a fork), slotted into Via Giubbonari, a curving passage today still narrow. Joseph Connors, in his "Baroque Urbanism," discusses the extremely ancient streets of this part of Rome, pointing out how they wander eastwards from the bridge from Hadrian's Tomb, now Castel Sant'Angelo, forking as they go.¹ The Renaissance papacy used these roads often, as a way to San Giovanni in Laterano and across Rome, and palaces of the early Renaissance clustered along them. For our nocturnal misdeeds, the wide network mattered little, but the local *Strada Dritta* bore much social traffic.

Our louche central character straddled lines—moral, social, sexual, and religious. A liminal man, he was and is hard to place, and his actions, crossing boundaries ethical and social, remind us not to put Rome and Romans into boxes. His name reveals his hybrid nature—Ludovico Santa Croce. At first glance, nothing strange there, but, as genealogies show, the civic noble Santa Croce, descending, they believe, from Publius Valerius Publicola, anti-Tarquin and one of Rome's first consuls, in the sixteenth century named their children almost exclusively from Livy, Sallust, and Tacitus: not a Ludovico in sight. Moreover, law courts called him "the son of the late Giovanni Antonio de Franchi" so, if he was a Santa Croce, the noble house somehow adopted him.² A friend, aware of this flimsy identity, says of him, "The said Messer Ludovico *si fa romano de casa de Santa Croce et per romano il tengo*."³ Close reading: the friend does not call him a Santa Croce: just "*si fa*"—"he claims to be"; the friend readily affirms his Roman identity but, as to family, balks. But Ludovico, clearly, grew up some at the family's palace. A friend recalls: "I have known him for more than twelve years in Rome and I knew him when he was a lad [*putto*] here at the Santa Croce [*qui alli Santa Croce*]."⁴ Magrino, the witness, a very recent Jewish convert (Feast of the Annunciation, 1556), testifies not at the prison as is usual, but at home, as

he is sick, and with his “here at the Santa Croce” shows how, now *fatto christiano*, he has moved a mere block or so beyond the ghetto gate at Piazza Giudia to lodgings near the Santa Croce palace. Ludovico is sufficiently Santa Croce that, back in Carnevale of 1557, a noble Santa Croce helped bail him out of prison.⁵ But he is no *signore*; his cronies call him *messer* instead. This title flags both his status and its ambiguity.

In 1557, at his first trial here, Santa Croce is “about twenty-six, as he asserts.”⁶ If so, then either his friend Magrino knew him longer than twelve years or, back then, age fourteen, he had become a fairly lanky *putto*. He was born in 1531 or so. By 1565, at the second trial, he would be thirty-four. No sign of a marriage. His loves, we will see, were all casual, among the whores. No sign, either, of a craft, trade, or civic office. He probably still lived at the palace as, for sex, he took his hireling women to the bathhouse (*stufia*) or bunked down with them at friends’ and seldom, if ever, took them home. So how did he pass the days? He hung out at the Pescheria, the fish market at one end of the *Strada Dritta*. And the company he kept: fishmongers, Jews, and recent converts. Plus prostitutes. He ate, drank, caroused, and got into abundant trouble. In 1565 the court asks for his criminal record:

I have been in prison three or four times, here in Tor di Nona and in Corte Savelli. I don’t remember why.

And his lordship asked him that he at least tell for what crimes and excesses he was investigated and tried.

He answered: I cannot remember things that are fifteen or sixteen years old, but I know well that I have not been under investigation either for homicides or for ugly things [*cose brutte*]. It is true that I remember that I was in jail in Corte Savelli for having had a brawl with another *gentilhomo*, and for it I paid ten scudi to Messer Pietro Bello.⁷

Here, Ludovico is as evasive as his memory is fuzzy; *cose brutte* indeed came up in court. The court asks after a jailbreak.⁸ The fight was probably in Carnevale, 1557, when Pietro Bello was a judge on staff.⁹ In June, 1563, Ludovico was wounded in a brawl where he, a reluctant fighter, stabbed a spice-trader in the chest.¹⁰ In a trial of another unruly gentleman, the court asks the suspect’s serving woman if her master ever wanted to kill our Ludovico. “I don’t know,” she says, “but know that the said Ludovico was wounded once and that [my master] Pietro de Fabii rejoiced.”¹¹

So Ludovico is a man on many margins. A self-proclaimed *gentilhomo*, he haunts the edge of his foster-family, in a neighborhood strung between Jews and Christians, and his socializing crosses boundaries of station, ethnicity, family, community, and moral action. So let’s join him for the evening.

We begin not along the *Strada Dritta*, but atop Piazza Navona, by Torre San-guigna and the Pace church, with two Christians, doublet-makers both. It was before Christmas, 1556.¹² Antonio Scapuccio and Mario di Simone came off

work at the Ave Maria sunset bell. Mario, aged twenty, lived across town, by Santissimi Apostoli. With Antonio he went back three years, from their work.¹³ As for Ludovico, Antonio had known him since childhood: “at the time I and he were lads, we had a close friendship.”¹⁴ Antonio, via Ludovico, knew that Fabritio, another convert, kept a house where friends gathered. “Antonio brought me to the house of Fabritio, Jew-made-Christian, who sells ironware.”¹⁵ When the doublet-makers arrived, Ludovico was there, with Magrino, and one Giulio Matuccio, and the host, Fabritio.¹⁶

So began their evening. “We all decided, in agreement, to go find a Signora called Vienna Venetiana, friend of the aforesaid Giulio Matuccio.”¹⁷ Mario adds:

And when we were at Vienna’s house—she lived at Torre Sanguigna—Antonio Scapuccio knocked on the door, and the mother, if I remember, said that she had hurt her arm and could not keep us company, and that we should let her off.¹⁸

Torre Sanguigna was far from Ludovico’s haunts.

“We left and went to a pie-shop, also near Torre Sanguigna, and got ourselves a *pasticcio*. And I don’t remember which of us paid for it.”¹⁹ Magrino, a convert, adds that the pie contained a shoulder of pork.²⁰ Ludovico stepped in, announcing as they walked: let’s fetch my whore!²¹ So entered Betta, a *cortigiana grande*, says Mario, meaning not a top-rank prostitute, but, as Magrino says disparagingly, a big tall woman—“una donna grande longaccia.”²² Betta lived near the stufa of Felice, near the Cavaglieri family palace, two blocks north of the *strada dritta*.²³ As the five trailed after him, Ludovico vaunted his sex with her:

And Ludovico said it again, while he was going with us for that woman, and he was heading to knock on her door . . . that last night he had slept with this woman, and he said that she had a fine ass and that it gripped firmly.²⁴

At Betta’s lodgings, the men remained outside. Ludovico called or knocked and the prostitute came down, and, oddly, if she really had slept with him the night before, in error she embraced the wrong man, as if Ludovico, though a *gentil-huomo*, was hard to tell from the company he kept.²⁵ “And we asked her if she wanted to come to dinner with us, showing her the *pasticcio*, and she said yes, and came away. And going down the street Messer Ludovico and she went arm in arm.”²⁶ The passage illustrates handsomely some workings of Roman prostitution. Note how complex were the exchanges between these women and their customers. Roman prostitution was seldom simple sex for plain cash. Like many transactions in the *economia barocca*, it had wide bandwidth and complex linkages forward, backward, and across society.²⁷ Betta here accepted a promise of food and entertainment, and furnished public gestures of affection, a gift to Ludovico, who could flaunt her to posse and to street.

The party, with Betta making seven, retired to Ludovico's hang-out, the inn at Pescheria, called after its owner Domenidio.²⁸ It was some hour after night-fall.²⁹ "All of us, in company, went to dinner at the aforesaid inn, and we brought with us a *pasticcio*, and we ate."³⁰ To this *osteria*, patrons readily brought food. After dinner, the whole group went to spend the night at Fabritio's dwelling, near Ludovico's own house, where Ludovico, other times that winter, sometimes brought women: "in the time that he was made Christian . . . he lent me the room."³¹ On the way, the men say, Ludovico again boasted of anal sex with Betta.³²

The room had but a single bed; Fabritio, leaving the bed to his gentleman guest, hospitably withdrew to a little attic, a *solarello*—"no great thing"—and slept.³³ Magrino "gave the command to fetch from home a mattress, which we threw on the floor."³⁴ Ludovico and Betta undressed at once and slipped under the covers.³⁵

There was a bed curtain. It would have had many colors, and it was mine [Magrino's].

And to a question he answered: It was not spread around the bed but gathered to one side.³⁶

Ludovico, in his account, avers that the curtain was draped around the bed.³⁷ While Magrino settled somehow on a chair, clothed, to spend the night, the two doublet-makers and Giulio huddled on the mattress. Ludovico, meanwhile, lay snugly in one convert's bed and another convert's hangings, in a convert's house.

"Before the light was put out we were all joking and chatting, and Messer Ludovico told us please to put out the light."³⁸ And then, as men settled for the night, Ludovico thrust his arm out from the covers, making a letter "O" with his index and middle finger.³⁹ Lest he shame Betta he said nothing, Antonio avers, but Mario claims he boasted loudly.⁴⁰

Mirth erupted.

Everybody laughed at that and said to one another, "He has fucked her in the ass. Fire! Fire!"⁴¹

The stake, of course. And slim regard for Betta!

What is going on here? The social psychology of this scene is tangled. We have three Christian artisans, two ex-Jews on the fluid boundary of the ghetto, and one semi-gentleman half outside his noble family, a troop cemented, perhaps, by Ludovico's leadership, occasional largess, and arrant breach of sexual and moral rules. All six men share in Betta's humiliation. Ludovico parades his transgression and the risks he runs and, laughing, the cronies applaud and, vicariously, thrill to his vulnerability. Collusion cements this solidarity.

Ludovico and Betta were the first to fall asleep.⁴²

Much later, say the others, invited by Ludovico to join them in the bed, Magrino left the chair, climbing in still clothed, and fell asleep.⁴³

And then awoke, jostled by the bounce of sex.

I could feel it when he was screwing her, and she had her bottom towards Ludovico and she was turned with her face toward me. And it was one time that I felt it, and I did not see him stick it in because it was no affair of mine. I know well that he was screwing her, and he was shoving her towards me, so that it made me wake up.⁴⁴

Magrino is remembering events before Christmas, almost nine months earlier. The trial took place in August, 1557, first at the Inquisition, at the Ripetta. Halfway through, interrogations moved to the prisons of the Governor of Rome. That is why this record survives. Precisely two years later, when Paul IV died, Rome's most tumultuous Vacant See broke out. Mobs attacked the Inquisition's Ripetta offices, burning the papers, and ransacked the house of the tribunal's notary.⁴⁵ Later, Napoleon's supporters would destroy the Inquisition's later trials, so a transcript such as this is rare indeed. Both at Ripetta and later, this trial has a Holy Office feel; the magistrates treated the courtroom as a confessional, sparing neither shame nor feelings with their swift, intrusive questions. Why did the matter slip to the criminal court? The crime in question, though moral and involving converts, revealed no taint of heresy. Prostitution in mixed company was no crime and the court was after anal intercourse.

He was asked if on that night he the witness heard the said Betta moaning and crying out, because the said Messer Ludovico was having intercourse and fucking her [*futuebat*] from the back.

He answered: "I could hear it when she was screwed the first time by Messer Ludovico. She was crying out [*si lamentava*]. But one can cry out for several things." And to a question of me the notary he said: "She can cry out the way women do." And I the notary asked, "And how do women do?" He said, "They can cry out because it pleases them and they can cry out because it hurts them too. But, one time, as I said, I felt it when he screwed her."⁴⁶

When the Inquisition hauled her in, Betta did her all to prove it wasn't so. Her testimony about what went on in bed surely did her little good, as, on point after point, she lied elsewhere about her history with Ludovico, shown as far skimpier than others alleged. Her testimony, earthy and vehement, catches well a prostitute's voice in court.

He never did it to me in that place. It is true that Messer Ludovico told me to turn around, that he wanted to do it cunt-backwards [*a potta retro*], and I told him, "You want to trick me. You want to stick it in contrary-wise." And he said no, that he wanted to do it cunt-backwards, and so I turned around and he did it to me cunt-backwards. I know where he went in, and if he was fooled, I was not fooled.⁴⁷

Betta appears twice in the record. The first time, to cover for the weakness of her case, she regales the judge with promises to live in virtue.

If I had consented to the other way, it would seem to me that God would not keep me on earth. And if I have done wrong in one way, I don't want to do wrong in the other. And if I get out of this I want to go to Santa Maria di Loreto, and then to my home to do good works, and I want to go this September. And if he wants to say that he did it to me from behind against Nature, he is lying through his throat, and he is tricked, and, me, I am not tricked, because I protect myself from this the way I do from fire.⁴⁸

The next morning, Betta, Ludovico, and most of the posse stayed. (Mario, sleeping clothed, had slipped off early to his shop.)⁴⁹ At breakfast, the boasts went on:

She never heard a word when Messer Ludovico told us that he had twice screwed Betta in the ass, but he said it at length to us.

He was asked if he said Betta was at the table eating with them, how could Ludovico have said those words, since they could be heard by Betta.

He answered: I will tell you. We were kidding Ludovico . . . and when he said it at the table she had not yet sat down.⁵⁰

As current events show sadly, Renaissance Italy was hardly the only place where, for some admirers, the swaggering abuse of women gives callous men allure.

Jump eight years ahead. It was 1565, not 1557, and Ludovico was now some thirty-four years old. Still unmarried, still at loose ends, he haunted the same tight quarter, up to little good. He had a new entourage; none of the same men turn up. At the center, as ever, sat that *osteria* of Domenidio, in Pescheria. His cronies were, this time, two or three fishmongers and one Cesare Vallati, son of the civic noble family that owned a palace on the square, facing its ghetto gate. The Vallati house still stands, pared back to its medieval core, which now bears sad plaques about Roman Jewish deaths at Nazi hands. Cesare was gentleman enough to hold, they said, a civic office.⁵¹

On Friday, November 23, the friends stirred up dinner at the inn. Meo, fishmonger, says:

Ludovico Santa Croce came to me, as I was in Pescheria. It may have been a half-hour after dark, and he asked me if we wanted to go to dinner together at the *osteria* of Domenidio. I said yes and so I picked up some fish, and along with Grillo and Ludovico we went to the *osteria* of Domenidio, and while we were setting up to eat Cesare arrived and said, "I want to eat with you," and so he too sat at the table and we were four in all.⁵²

Meo reports that, when he left his fish-bench, he brought sardines, while Grillo fetched clams.⁵³ In the midst of dinner, “a Jew”—nobody names him, ever—joined the group; no sign he ate with them.⁵⁴

After dinner, except Grillo, all left together. “Let’s go to the house of my whore,” said Ludovico. “We said, ‘let’s go!’ and Cesare said, ‘I want to join you.’”⁵⁵ The court asks later, did Cesare and Ludovico go with sword in hand?⁵⁶ Probably. The men took the strada dritta, the ghetto to their left, the Santa Croce tower to the right, over to Il Crocefisso, behind or under where the big church of San Carlo later stood.⁵⁷ Ludovico’s woman of the month was Olimpia, who, it turned out, was off with an *amico*, a regular of hers, who, she says, felt ill, so she headed homeward with a Lorenzo *stufarolo* in tow.⁵⁸ But when Ludovico and his cronies arrived, only the house’s mistress, Lucretia, was yet home. Olimpia calls Lucretia the house *padrona*; in court, Ludovico will call her a whore, whom he has known for years, presumably hooking up with tenant after tenant.⁵⁹

At Olimpia’s front door, the four men, masking voices and pretending to speak Spanish, shouted, “Open up the door!” Lucretia: “They banged six or seven times, for I was not of a mind to open, ever.”⁶⁰

At last I went to the window and told them that I did not want to open for them under any circumstances, and told them to change their talk because no way could I not recognize them. I knew them just fine, but, with my tenant not home, and because, I knew, they wanted nothing of me, I had no intention of opening for them. Instead, I said, I would throw water on their heads if they did not get away from the door.⁶¹

The four men loped east to Via dei Chiavari, still in Lucretia’s sight.⁶² There they encountered a second Lucretia. Wife of wealthy Cyntho Perusco, and mother of two children, she was returning with a servant—but with no light, lest she be seen and recognized—from a call on her procurator.⁶³

Two men armed with swords and daggers, with their swords under their arms and the daggers in hand unsheathed, came at us and at once they stopped me and one of them put his hand to my neck, feeling my neck, thinking that perhaps I had some chain necklace or string of gems.⁶⁴

And I said to them, “I am a poor woman. What do you want of me?” And I was screaming, “Thieves thieves!” When they heard that, they let go of me.⁶⁵

Giovanni Maria, the servant, thought he recognized one of the four assailants: “Ah Meo, why are you doing this to us?”⁶⁶ Meo at once hid his face behind his cape.⁶⁷ Giovanni Maria’s assailants, Meo and the Jew, grabbed him. “They were holding on to me and they told me to keep silent, and they held the naked daggers to my neck.”⁶⁸ The assailants released their quarry, only briefly. Lucretia will tell the Governor: “When we had walked three or four paces, the same men,

with some others, made a circle around me and some of them grabbed me from one side and some from the other, putting their daggers to my throat.”⁶⁹

Giovanni Maria tells the Governor: “they began punch me and shove me and they threw me to the ground.”⁷⁰ Adds Lucretia:

And they took from him a pouch. In it were ten giulios, between testoni coins and giulio coins, and a gold ring that was mine, with a Jesus on the top, and on the bottom, there is a “claw of the great beast” [a fabled stone with curative powers], which was also in that pouch, and they took from it also the belt and a handkerchief. The ring contains 18 giulii of gold.⁷¹

Giovanni Maria adds that the pouch had been tied to his waist and that Lucretia had removed her ring to wash her hands.⁷²

One of the band of four, almost certainly Cesare Vallati, as Ludovico was by now no youngster, may have had second thoughts:

When this [theft] was done one of those youngsters took me by the hand and told me, “Come here. I promise you as a gentleman that I will not hurt you.” And he asked me, who was that woman. And I told him that she was not for them, and that they should let her go, and that she was the wife of Messer Cynthio Perusco.⁷³

Ludovico had other ideas. One of the two underlings, probably not the Jew but Meo, asked him “Messer, what are we to do?” “Carry her off, carry her off!”⁷⁴

And they tried with all their might to lead me to a house, for they took me by force and they dragged me . . . But I cried out, “Thieves! Thieves! Is this how you assassinate people in the street!” And I told them that I had nothing on me and that they should come to my house, that was near there.⁷⁵

The assailants hauled Lucretia into an alley.⁷⁶ Lucretia was convinced that they wanted to drag her to a *stufa*, a bath house of the sort Ludovico haunted. As they pulled her, Lucretia fell in the mud, losing her *pianelle*, her clogs. “She told them that her clogs had fallen off, and they told her to keep walking, and they were making her walk up that alley, leading her, as there were three or four around her.”⁷⁷ And then, providentially, down the alley came two men, in front a servant with a torch, and, behind him, his master, Agostino Palloni, a man of substance whose house stood close to the Santa Croce palace.⁷⁸

And when the light arrived, I recognized the gentleman, and I begged him for the love of God to help me. And while I was saying those words, one of those young men, who had dragged me, as he thought that the light was not coming from that side and that he would not be seen—Messer Agostino recognized one of those young men, who is called Cesare Romano.

And at that Messer Agostino said, “Ah Cesare, what are you doing [*che fai*]. What is this! Do you see that you [*tu*] are doing wrong?”⁷⁹

Turning towards Agostino, says Giovanni Maria, Lucretia tripped on an iron grate and once more fell and then, as suppliant, grasped his cape: “Ah, Messer Agostino, don’t abandon me . . . !”⁸⁰

Agostino, Lucretia, and Cesare then stood together, a threesome. First off, Cesare, to catch his social balance, tried to place Lucretia as a Roman matron. Then Agostino did the same. Giovanni Maria tells the Governor:

The man whom Agostino had called Cesare asked Madonna Lucretia if she knew Cyntho Perusco. She said, “Yes, I know him, and I have two children with him, and he is my husband.” And Messer Agostino asked Madonna Lucretia if she knew Messer Francesco Calvi, and she said yes, and if he came to her house with her she would show him her daughter.⁸¹

Gentleman to gentleman! Cesare Vallati, in night’s shadow, had strayed well outside his class’s code of conduct, and Agostino’s torch jolted him back from the abyss. He switched codes as nimbly as he could.

Then Messer Agostino turned to Cesare and told him, “Cesare, son, you have done wrong.”

And then Cesare told Messer Agostino to leave, and said that he would have Madonna Lucretia escorted by a servant of his.⁸²

No such thing happened, of course. After questions to Lucretia about how she came to be out after dark, Agostino, with his torch and serving man, conveyed them both back home.⁸³

At her window, the other Lucretia, the madam, had seen and heard the fracas. Outraged, woman to woman, she strove to allay the trouble.

I heard a woman who was starting to scream, and when I looked toward where I heard that cry, I looked and saw a woman with a man, and she was screaming, “What do you want with me, brothers, pull the door rope for me, pull the door rope for me!” and when I heard those words, I feared it might be some neighbor, and I knocked on the window of Diana and told her, “Listen to your sister who is screaming,” and she answered, “My sister is here at home.”⁸⁴

While Cesare and Agostino parleyed, the other three miscreants probably crept away, and soon, all four were back at Olimpia’s door. This time they had luck, as Olimpia turned up, with Lorenzo her bathhouse worker, and his lute. “I came back home and I found Ludovico Santa Croce there at my door, along with Meo the fishmonger and with two others whom I did not know, but there was a

Jew.”⁸⁵ Lucretia opened for Olimpia and, willy-nilly, in came all the others, with Ludovico, as usual, in the lead.⁸⁶

Note Lucretia’s version:

At that moment, my tenant called Olimpia arrived, along with an *amico* called Lorenzo the bathhouse worker, who played the lute, and I had to pull the rope, and then there came in, along with my tenant, Ludovico Santa Croce, Meo, Cesare Vallati, and a Jew.⁸⁷

We learn from Olimpia several things. For one, the Jew was a stranger, known only, presumably, by his obligatory Jew’s cap. For another, Cesare Vallati had rejoined the crew. And, for a third, while she knew Meo, Vallati, a stranger to her if not to the madam, was less central to Ludovico’s habitual posse. Neither he nor the Jew had been part of the dinner’s start; though locals, they were hangers-on.

When the men entered, Lucretia, the madam, upbraided them. “And when they were up the stairs, I said to them, ‘Oh this is a fine state of affairs! Poor women cannot go in the street.’ And they told me that they weren’t the ones who did it.”⁸⁸ Lorenzo, with the lute, would prove Ludovico’s undoing. The men all stayed a while in Olimpia’s room, listening to him play. And then Ludovico led Olimpia off to the Santa Anna *stufa* to spend the night. The other three escorted him down the block, then went their separate ways.⁸⁹

We catch a bit of the denouement via Barbara, Meo’s ex-*puttana*, who, she tells the court, had after three years broken with him because he owed her big money on borrowed goods. Barbara had moved to Monte Savelli, just a block down-river from Pescheria.⁹⁰

I went to bed without dinner because I felt ill, and while I was in bed with Annibale the fish-monger I heard passing in the street Cesare Vallati with other people whom I did not see, and he said, “Your faithful servant, Signora Barbara, my heart!” I made no answer.⁹¹

Annibale and Barbara went back, she says, three years; she swam as easily among the fishmongers as a mackerel in the sea. But Cesare Vallati, clearly, slipped through these same waters; in the intimate spaces of the city, these men and women moved up and down class lines. Annibale, when asked, would tell Madonna Lucretia what he knew about the crime. Small world!⁹²

The very next day, Madonna Lucretia sent her servant to scout the local bathhouses. Lorenzo, the fellow with the lute, a *paesano*, led Giovanni Maria to Ludovico and Meo, who would be arrested on Monday, together.⁹³ At Olimpia’s, the four men, said Lorenzo, had been “in a terrible mood and all of them distressed.”⁹⁴ Agostino Palloni, meanwhile, refused to help Lucretia—“he sent word to me through Cynthio that it wasn’t a gentleman’s role to accuse anybody, and that was it was enough that I had suffered no harm.”⁹⁵ Citing class solidarity

he covered for Cesare Vallati, who either fled or ducked prosecution. The Jew, luckily nameless, got away. We have neither a sentence nor knowledge what our four villains did with the rest of their lives.

Our story of status slippage and hasty re-calibration, coarse male solidarity, callous abuse of women, and female resilience models a careful reading of words, places, and actions, with an eye to the density of webs and the fine-grained texture of lives in time and space, to lay out the reflexes with which Romans navigated their city. Ludovico, uneasily perched on several margins, could build coalitions, trading his noble connections, hospitality, slovenly rapaciousness, and access to paid female sex and company for male support and applause. To Cesare he offered a pathway down, to the others perhaps a step upwards. These male solidarities in a moral grey zone show the porosity of Rome's social boundaries and its alliances' often easy give.

Notes

- 1 Connors, "Alliance and Enmity," 208–09.
- 2 Archivio di Stato di Roma, Governatore, Tribunale Criminale, Processi (16o secolo), busta 38, case 23, folio 568r: "Ludovicus de S. Cruce filius q. Io. Ant. d. Franchis." Henceforth, I give busta and folio only.
- 3 38.23, 559v: Antonio Scapuccio, August 15, 1557, to a notary at the Holy Office.
- 4 38.23, 573r, Magrino, August 26, 1557, at home sick, to a notary.
- 5 38.23, 579v: Ludovico cites Valerio Santa Croce and noble Mario Mellino. For Magrino's conversion at the Annunciation in 1555: 38.23, 573r, Magrino.
- 6 38.23, 568r.
- 7 Busta 103, 909r: Ludovico Santa Croce: ". . . costione con un altro gentil'homo . . ."
- 8 103, 909v: "fregit carceres et unde exivit."
- 9 38.23, 572v: "questo carnevale [1557] . . . messer Ludovico uscii di pregione in Corte Savella."
- 10 Investigazioni 80, 181v–183v, for 23–24, from June, 1563.
- 11 38.19, 461v: ". . . se ne reallegrava."
- 12 38.23, 577v: Betta: ". . . avanti natale."
- 13 38.23, 562v–563r: for age and employment; for the friendship and the workplace: 38.23, 562v–563r.
- 14 38.23, 559v: "eravamo regazi havevamo amicitia intrinseca insieme."
- 15 38.23, 562v: Mario: "Fabritio giudio fatto Cristiano che venne li ferri."
- 16 We know little about Giulio, never interrogated. Ludovico seems to place him among the converts: 38.23, 570r–v: "Vi pratica in questa casa Julio Mattuzzo, Fabritio doi o tre altri giudei facti christiani . . . de continuo li se ce vengono giudei et d'ogni sorte de generatione." But no other witness calls Giulio a convert.
- 17 38.23, 563r–v: Mario.
- 18 38.23, 563v: Mario: ". . . lei o la madre . . . disse che era ferita in uno braccio et che non posseva abadarci et che lavessemo per scusata."
- 19 Ibid.: Mario: ". . . a un pasticciero pur presso Torre Sanguigna et pigliassemo un pasticcio . . ."
- 20 38.23, 574r: "comprassemo una spalla de porco."
- 21 38.23, 564r: Mario: ". . . disse per la strada che voleva pigliar detta cortigiana."
- 22 38.23, 573v.
- 23 38.23, 563v: Mario: "apresso la stufa de Felice presso li Cavalieri."
- 24 28.23, 561r: Antonio Scapuccio: ". . . ando con noi per dicta donna et voleva bussare la porta . . . che haveva bravo culo et teneva bene."

- 25 38.23, 574r: Magrino, for Ludovico's call: "Messer Ludovico chiamandola . . ."; 38.23, 564r: Mario: "credendosi di abbracciar messer Ludovico abbraccio un altro in loco suo in cambio."
- 26 38.23, 564r: Mario: "Mostrandoli il pasticcio et per la strada messer Ludovico et liei andavano abbracciati insieme."
- 27 Ago, *Economia barocca*.
- 28 38.23, 560r: Antonio Scapuccio: "l'ostaria de Domenidio in Piscaria." 38.23, 574r: for the name's origin.
- 29 38.23, 564r: Mario, for the time.
- 30 38.23, 560r: Antonio di Scapuccio: "tutti de compagnia . . . portassimo . . . un pasticcio . . ."
- 31 38.23, 568v: Ludovico Santa Croce: ". . . Fabritio giudio facto christiano apresso . . . [a] casa mia nel tempo che e facto christiano et lui me impresto la stantia"; 38. 560r: Antonio Scapuccio: "presso la casa de Santa Croce."
- 32 38.23, 561r: Antonio Scapuccio for the boast: "et di poi che andassimo a magnar a l'ostaria . . ."
- 33 38.23, 574v: Magrino: "un solaretto di sopra quale era poca de cosa"; 38.23, 572r: Fabritio: "dormivo io sopra una solarello."
- 34 38.23, 560r: Antonio Scapuccio: ". . . un matarazo quale lo buttassimo in terra."
- 35 38.23, 574v: Magrino: ". . . spogliati si misero sotto li panni."
- 36 38.23, 574v–575r: Magrino: "un paviglione che saria de piu colori quale era il mio . . . radunato da una banda."
- 37 38.23, 569r: Ludovico claims to have closed the curtain: "mettevo il paviglione atorno."
- 38 38.23, 564v: Mario: "et avanti che la lume fosse svitata stavamo a burlare et ciancinare . . . che di gratia volessemo svitar la lume."
- 39 38.23, 561v: Antonio Scapuccio: ". . . facendo un zeno con il deto grosso et con il deto indice facendo uno O designando che lui haveva chiavato nel culo dicta donna"; 38.23, 564v: Mario: "Dicendo forte con noi altri Nel proprio facendo con il detto grosso et con il indice il tondo."
- 40 38.23, 561v: Antonio Scapuccio: "lui non diceva chiaramente per rispetto de dicta donna che non volea svergognarla"; Loudly: Mario: "Dicendo forte."
- 41 Ibid.: Antonio Scapuccio: ". . . la chiavata in culo foco foco."
- 42 38.23, 574v: Magrino: "forno primi messer Ludovico et la donna."
- 43 38.23, 574r: Magrino, for sleeping clothed: "et io ancora dormi . . . vestito"; for much later: 38.23, 560r: Scapuccio: "Giovanni Maria . . . dipoi a un gran pezo . . . se ando a corigare nel medemmo lecto."
- 44 38.23, 575r: Magrino: "io ho inteso quando lui la chiavava et lei teneva le natiche verso Ludovico et lei voltata con il viso verso di me et io una volta il sentia et io non lho visto metter dentro perche io non ce ho tenuto le mane. So bene che la chiavava et lui sbatteva detta [no noun] verso di me che mi fe svigliato."
- 45 Hunt, *The Vacant See*, 183–84.
- 46 38.23, 575v: notary and Magrino: ". . . langere et lamentare eo quia . . . ipsam retro negotiabat et futuebat.
Respondit io sentivo che le quando fu chiava[ta] la prima volta da messer Ludovico si lamentava. Ma si posseva lamentare de piu cose . . . Si posseva lamentare come fanno le donne . . . Se posono lamentare che li sappia bono et si posono lamentare che se li faccia male ancora. Ma io una volta come o detto o sentito che l'habia chiavata."
- 47 38.23, 577v: Betta, August 23, 1557: "lui mai ha fato in tal loco e e ben vero che messer Ludovico mi disse che mi voltassi che me lo voleva far a potta retro et io li disse tu me voi gabare tu me voi mettere al contrario et lui disse de no che il voleva fare a potta retro et cossi io mi voltaì et mi fece a potta retro. Io so dove intro. Si lui se e gabbato non me sonno gabbata io."
- 48 38.25, 567r: Betta, August 21, 1557: ". . . mi parrebbe che dio non mi tenesse sopra la terra et se ho fatto male per una via, non voglio far male per l'altra, et si io ne esco voglio andare a Santa Maria de Loreto et poi a casa mia a far bene . . . et se si gabba lui non mi gabbo io, perche me ne guardaro come dal fuoco."

- 49 38.23, 565r: Mario.
- 50 38.23, 576r-v: "Lei non intese mai parole . . . Noi davamo la baia a Ludovico . . . quando lui il diceva a tavola lei non se ce era messa ancora."
- 51 103, 911r: Ludovico: "me pare che sia cancelliero de conservatori."
- 52 103, 906v: Meo: ". . . voleamo andare a cena al'hostaria de domenedio insieme . . . et così righai certo piscio et . . . andammo al'hosteria . . . et mentre voleamo cenare arrivo li Cesare . . . lui se messe a tavola et cenammo tutti quatro insieme."
- 53 103, 907r: Meo: "portai certe sarde . . . et Grillo porto certe telline."
- 54 103, 907v: Meo: "un'hebreo . . . venne . . . mentre che magnammo."
- 55 103, 907r-v: Meo: "voliamo andar a casa della mia puttana et noi dicemmo andamo et Cesare ancora disse io ve voglio fare compagnia."
- 56 103, 911v.
- 57 The present Via del Monte della Farina was then Via del Crocefisso, named for church, San Biagio del Crocefisso (or del Annulo), demolished circa 1617 to expand San Carlo: Lombardi, *Roma*, 222; Delli, *Le Strade*, 339; Gnoli, *Topografia*, 91; Adinolfi, *Roma*, 171. Olimpia probably lived towards San Biagio.
- 58 103, 913r: Olimpia: "da uno amico mio quella sera . . . tornai a casa et trovai Ludovico Santa Croce li alla mia porta"; 913v for the name Lorenzo.
- 59 103, 918r: Ludovico: "sono parecchi anni."
- 60 103, 917r: Lucretia the madam: "parlando spagnolo et contrafacendo il parlare loro solito . . . apri qua la sporta che batterno sette o otto volte ch'io non li volsi mai aprire."
- 61 Ibid.: ". . . non li volevo aprire . . . dovessero mutare parlare perche non potessi di non conoscerli, . . . ma per non ci esser' la mia pigionante in casa et sapendo che non voleano niente da me io non li volsi aprire anzi . . . haverci buttato del acqua in testa se non si fussero levati dalla porta."
- 62 Ibid.: "correre verso li Chiavari."
- 63 103, 889r: Lucretia the wife: "retornandome . . . senza lume et con una cannuccia in mano per non esser vista ne conosciuta." One Cynthio Perusco lodged by the Minerva: *Bullettino della Commissione archeologica comunale di Roma* 29, 15. One puzzle: on October 7, 1567, a Cinzio Perusci by San Marcello, not the Minerva, buried a wife named not Lucretia but Ortensia. de Dominicis, *Notizie biografiche*, 275; And, at court, (103, 899r) Lucretia appears as "Lucretia q. Petri"—no father's family name, no husband's name. Is Lucretia a *femina*, a semi-wife?
- 64 Ibid., r-v: Lucretia: "Doi armati . . . me si ferno incontro et subito me fermorno et un di loro me misse la mano al collo tastandomi il collo pensando forse ch'io havessi qualche collana o vezza."
- 65 Ibid., v: ". . . io son poveretta che volete da me strillando ai ladri ai ladri . . . me lasciorno"; the servant confirms this and notes that other men were also holding Lucretia: 103, 902r.
- 66 103, 902r: 25: ". . . perche questo a noi."
- 67 Ibid.: "se misse la cappa inanti il viso et pero non posso saper' ne poddi veder' se l'era quel Meo."
- 68 Ibid.: ". . . pugnali nudi presso alla gola." Why daggers? The gentlemen, with their swords, held Lucretia.
- 69 Ibid.: Lucretia: ". . . un cerchio intorno et chi mi pigliava da un canto et chi dal altro mettendomi li pugnali alla gola." Giovanni Maria: Ibid., 902r: "ci fermamo per paura."
- 70 Ibid.: Giovanni Maria: ". . . dar de i pugnì et d'urtoni et mi buttorno in terra."
- 71 103, 900r: Lucretia: ". . . con un yesu di sopra et di sotto c'e l'ongia della gran bestia . . . ancho la cintura et un fazzoletto: che l'anello ci e 18 giulii d'oro." This "yesu" may have been a monogram. Giovanni Maria confirms almost all these goods.
- 72 103, 902r-v: Giovanni Maria: "una scarsella che io portava cinta. . . a tenere lavandosi la mano . . . messo in la scarsella."
- 73 103, 902v: Lucretia: ". . . vi prometto da gentilhuomo de non ti far dispiacer . . . che non era per loro . . . che era moglie di Messer Cynthio Perusco." Cesare had yet to hurt the servant.

- 74 Ibid.; Giovanni Maria: “messer che volemo fare . . . menavola via menavola via.” See also Lucretia: 103, 899v: “menala su menala su strascinala.” Why do we say Meo and not the Jew? Note Meo’s ongoing relationship with Ludovico, their habit of joint action, plus that prompt “Messer.”
- 75 103, 899v: Lucretia: “. . . con molta istanza di menarmi in una casa che . . . per forza . . . me strascinavano . . . a i ladri a i ladri a questo modo si assassina alla strada, . . . che venessero in casa mia . . .” Why this invitation? Probably demonstrate her station, not to proffer loot.
- 76 103, 199v: Lucretia: “per andare al arco delli catinari.” The present Via dei Falegnami then was Via dei Catinari: Gnoli, *Toponomia*, 69. This Arco was demolished for San Carlo ai Catinari: Gnoli, *Toponomia*, 11.
- 77 103, 903r: Giovanni Maria: “. . . gl’era cascade le pianella . . . diceano che caminasse . . . la faceano camminar . . . tre o quattro attorno.” See also Lucretia: 103, 899v: “cascai in terra in un fangho et lasciai li pianelle.”
- 78 For Agostino Pallone’s house, see Cohen and Cohen, *Words and Deeds*, 136. For the two men: 103, 903r: Giovanni Maria: “arrivò quel che portava la torcia accesa et . . . mr Agostino Palone . . . per il medesimo vicolo.” In 1577, Agostino would be buried in Santa Maria in Publicolis, the Santa Croce family church: de Dominicis, *Notizie biografiche*, 267.
- 79 103, 899v–900r: Lucretia: “. . . cognobbi detto messer . . . per l’amor de dio che me aiutasse . . . pensandosi che il lume non venesse da quella banda et de non esser visto detto mr Augistino cognobbe . . . Cesari romano, al quale disse Mr. Augustino ah Cesari che fai, che cosa e questa[!] . . .”
- 80 103, 903r: Giovannia Maria: “casco con una gamba in una ferrata et . . . se attaccò alla cappa di Messer Augustino . . . Mr Augustino di grazia. non me abbandonate per l’amor de Dio.”
- 81 103, 903r–v: Giovanni Maria: “. . . se conosceva Cyntho Perusco, et lei disse sì che lo conosce et ho doi figli con lui et e mio marito et . . . se la conosceva messer Francesco Calvi et lei disse de sì . . . se li andava in casa con lei che li mostraria la figlia.”
- 82 103, 903v: Giovanni Maria: “. . . Cesari figlio tu hai fatto male . . . che andasse via che farria accompagnare Madonna Lucretia da un suo servitore.”
- 83 Ibid.; Lucretia: “m’accompagno con la torcia.”
- 84 103, 917r–v: Lucretia the madam: “. . . guardai et viddi una donna con un’uomo che cridava: che diceva che volete da me fratelli che volete da me fratelli et diceva tiratimi la corda tiratimi la corda . . . dubitando io che non fusse qualche vicina, io bussai alla finestra della Diana . . . senti quella tua sorella che crida . . .” “Tiratimi la corda” here refers to Lucretia’s door-rope: “open up for me!” with a dative.
- 85 103, 913r: Olimpia: “. . . trovai Ludovico Santa Croce li alla mia porta assieme con Meo pescivendolo et con doi altri . . . ci era un’hebreo.”
- 86 Ibid.; Olimpia: “. . . Ludovico fu il primo”; 103, 918: Ludovico Santa Croce: “il primo io d’intrare in casa.”
- 87 103, 917r: Lucretia the madam: “. . . Olimpia insieme con un’ suo amico che si chiama Lorenzo stufarolo, quale sonava di liuto. Et me bisogno tirar’ la corda et alhora intro . . . Ludovico Santa [Croce] Meo Cesar Vallati et un hebreo.”
- 88 103, 917v: Lucretia the madam: “. . . o bella cosa, le povere donne non ponno andare per la strada et loro dissero che non erano stato.”
- 89 103, 913v: Olimpia, “Meo et l’altri ci accompagnorno sino alla stufa et poi se ne andorno con dio”; 914v: Meo: “insieme alla stufa et poi io me ne tornai a casa mia e Cesare e l’hebreo andorno a fare i fatti suoi.”
- 90 103, 922r: Barbara claims Meo has been her amico for three years; 103, 904r: Barbara: “e un mese ch’io l’ho lassato perche non mi piace piu l’amicitia sua et perche ha dieci scudi delli mei in mano.” Monte Savelli is today’s Teatro di Marcello, now stripped bare by archeology.
- 91 103, 922r: Barbara: “me ne andai a letto senza cena perche io me sentivo male et mentre ch’io stavo a letto con Annibale pescivendolo sentei passare per la strada Cesare

Vallata con altre genti . . . et disse servitor' Signora Barbera cor mio ch'io non li resposi altrimenti"

92 103, 914r: Giovanni Maria: "madonna Lucretia domando a . . . pescivendolo predetto per che causa fussi preso questo messer Ludovico et . . . rispose che fu preso perche haveva preso una donna nella strada."

93 103, 905v: Meo, on Tuesday: "io fui preso hiermatina in Ponte ch'io non so perche causa assieme con Messer Ludovico Santa Croce."

94 103, 901r: Lucretia the wife: "et che stavano molto di mala voglia et tutti afflitti."

95 103, 900v: Lucretia: "lui mi mando a dir per il detto Cynthio che non era offitio da gentilhomio di accusar nesuno e che mi bastava che io non havessi ricevuto mal nesuno."

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8

AESTHETICS, DRESS, AND MILITANT MASCULINITY IN CASTIGLIONE'S COURTIER

Gerry Milligan

In two unrelated sixteenth-century texts, a Renaissance prince was described as vulnerable to assassination because of a flawed fashion judgment. In his *Historia patria* (published 1503), the courtier Bernardino Corio recounted that just before Galeazzo Sforza left his castle on December 26, 1476, he put on and then took off his *corazina* because he felt that the chest armor made him look “too fat.”¹ The lack of armored protection was crucial as Galeazzo was famously stabbed to death during mass later that day. In his analysis of the event, Timothy McCall provocatively suggests that Galeazzo’s fatally bad judgment was determined by fashion; Galeazzo, according to McCall, was influenced by the growing pressure to conform to cultural expectations of a slim masculine figure.² Sixty years later, a Florentine prince was murdered by stabbing, and similar to the description of Galeazzo Sforza, a chronicler of the episode points to clothing’s role in the affair. Benedetto Varchi’s *Storia fiorentina* (incomplete at his death in 1565) recounts that just before Duke Alessandro de’ Medici left his bedchamber on the night of his murder in 1537, he contemplated whether he should wear his gloves “*da guerra*” (for war) or his perfumed gloves “*da fare all’amore*” (for making love).³ According to the story, Alessandro chose the love-gloves as they better matched his sable-lined cape and were suited to his planned sexual escapade. He apparently chose unwisely.

Elizabeth Currie argues that Varchi added this presumably invented anecdote about gloves in order to communicate—through sartorial metaphors—the gap between Duke Alessandro’s expected dutiful behavior and his actual irresponsible conduct.⁴ To Currie’s analysis, I add that the glove anecdote also participates in what had become a literary pattern of associating men’s clothing with physical weakness. If, in the first episode, the author indicates how a soft doublet made Galeazzo defenseless to the knife blade, in the second, the writer implies that the outcome of Alessandro’s evening might have been different had the prince

chosen his gloves “da guerra.” The two historiographical accounts of Galeazzo’s and Alessandro’s murders underscore not only the high stakes of men’s clothing choices but the relationship between literary representations of dress and elements of masculinity.

Varchi, like so many writers of the fifteenth and sixteenth century, chose to articulate men’s dress as integral components in representations of violence, war preparedness, moral virtue, and sexuality. Clothing was thus fundamental to Renaissance discourses of masculinity. While masculine subjectivity as performed through dress has been the focus of several excellent studies by fashion and art historians, what has gone somewhat unexplored is *how* clothing functioned in such discourses of masculinity.⁵ Was, for example, clothing presented as a symptom of men’s loss of masculine virtue or did writers claim that clothing had a more active role in the imperilment of men? Did so-called effeminate clothing cause men to weaken, or was it merely a byproduct of a so-called *anima effeminato*?

This essay will address these questions by looking at the interconnection of male dress, effeminacy, and militarism in Baldassare Castiglione’s *Libro del cortegiano* (*Book of the Courtier*). I have chosen to concentrate on Castiglione’s *Courtier* because of its prominent place in the history of dress and fashion as well as its role in the history of masculinity.⁶ The *Courtier* presents male dress as a high-stakes enterprise; a misstep in clothing not only had grave consequences for a man’s reputation, it was also a question of life or death. Like the gloves of Alessandro de’ Medici and the cuirass of Galeazzo Sforza, a man’s clothing choice could lead to glory or personal injury, and it could also result in (at least in Castiglione’s assessment) large-scale military defeat.

Arms in the *Courtier*

Very early in the book, Ludovico da Canossa declares arms to be the primary profession of the courtier [1.17].⁷ Yet, the privileged status of arms is not a settled question, and it is destabilized during a debate of arms vs. letters.⁸ The debate is framed by the same Ludovico, who asserts that the French only respect arms and abhor letters. Ludovico extols the value of letters by describing several successful military generals who trotted off to battle with copies of the *Iliad* or other literature at their side. His examples of successful and literary generals are offered as proof that the French were erroneous in their belief that literature damaged a man’s ability to fight: “Ma questo dire a voi è superfluo, ché ben so io che tutti conoscete quanto s’ingannano i Francesi pensando che le lettere nuocciano all’arme” (1.43, p. 92) (But there is no need to tell you this, for I am sure you all know how mistaken the French are in thinking that letters are detrimental to arms) (1.43, p. 51).⁹ Ludovico’s accusation of the misguided French could as well have been leveled against Italian contemporaries of Castiglione, since none other than Niccolò Machiavelli himself was proclaiming that letters were injurious to arms in both his *Art of War* as well as his *Florentine Histories*.¹⁰

Contrary to the view of the French (and Machiavelli), Ludovico proposes that letters are beneficial to arms; letters bring glory, and glory inspires courage in warfare: "Sapete che delle cose grandi ed arrischiare nella guerra il vero stimulo è la gloria. . . . E che la vera gloria sia quella che si commenda al sacro tesoro delle lettere" (1.43, p.92) (The true stimulus to great and daring deeds in war is glory. . . . And it is true glory that is entrusted to the sacred treasury of letters) (1.43, p. 51).¹¹ When Ludovico notes that literature, like the *Iliad*, could have a positive effect on soldiers, he shifts the debate that began with the hierarchy of arms and letters to the correlative and causative relationship between arms and letters.¹² For Ludovico, arms and letters are "concatenate" (conjoined) (1.46).

Ludovico's assessment of the positive effects of letters on arms is troubled by the fact that France, at least since 1494, had proven itself to be militarily superior to Italy. He hedges his argument in a prebuttal, acknowledging that others might cite recent French military success as evidence against his claim: "Non vorrei già che qualche avversario mi adducesse gli effetti contrari per rifiutar la mia opinione, allegandomi gli Italiani col lor saper lettere aver mostrato poco valor nell'arme" (1.43, p. 93) (I should not want some objector to cite me instances to the contrary in order to refute my opinion, alleging that for all their knowledge of letters the Italians have shown little worth in arms) (1.43, p. 51). To this objection, Ludovico states that the defeat of literate Italians by illiterate French is the fault of only a few men: "la colpa d'alcuni pochi aver dato, oltre al grave danno, perpetuo biasimo a tutti gli altri" (1.43, p. 93) (the fault of a few men has brought not only serious harm but eternal blame upon all the rest) (1.43, p. 52).

The debate of arms and letters in the *Courtier* raises two key points for my analysis on dress and militarism. The first is that there is an anxiety among the speakers that the actions of a "few men" can bring shame on all men.¹³ The book's project of social control depends in great part on this anxiety. Indeed, the belief that massive military defeat was caused by a few deviant men gives urgency to the entire masculine normativizing process (i.e., the ideal courtier). The second point, related to the first, is that men's ability to win wars could be affected (positively or negatively) by what are presumably unrelated aspects of a courtier's masculine identity. Throughout the *Courtier*, not only letters but music, dance, and of course dress are all placed in a context of their relationship to warfare.¹⁴ When, for example, one speaker condemns music as effeminate, another will anxiously argue that music stirs soldiers to combat, and thus it is rightfully masculine (1.47).

The book delineates the court and the battlefield as discrete yet interrelated spaces. The courtier-soldier is expected to shuttle between the two while performing hegemonic masculinity in both.¹⁵ The challenge is that certain practices of masculinity were viewed as causing a negative effect in one or the other space. The battlefield, in particular, is shown as vulnerable to the presence of courtly practices. Analogously, the court's refined spaces were shown as incompatible with certain military behaviors.¹⁶ Nonetheless, the court often measured itself against a functionality in war (e.g., music was useful in war) just as men in court

adopted martial aesthetics (e.g., court dress was an adaptation of the military tunic).¹⁷ There thus arises a tension within the *Courtier* between the masculinity of courtly practices and the masculinity of warfare, and this tension is routinely expressed as a fear that practices at court are deleterious to combat. The speakers never clearly articulate how dress, letters, and music might endanger war tactics and strategies, but they do repeatedly imply that refined behavior threatens masculinity. The reader is then left to leap the epistemological gap that assumes such a claim to be true. The cumulative effect of this rhetorical technique is that a fear of effeminacy underlies the entire project to produce an ideal courtier, and this fear is often articulated in terms of dress and aesthetics.¹⁸

Aesthetics and masculinity before Castiglione

The association of men's dress and aesthetics with effeminacy has a literary tradition that stretches at least back to Classical antiquity. Craig Williams' groundbreaking text, *Roman Homosexuality*, provides scores of ancient examples of writers reproaching men's aesthetics. In Roman texts, clothing, perfumes, and grooming habits were frequent subjects of scorn. According to Williams, men's aesthetics were invoked as part of accusations of effeminacy in what was consistently a reproach of men's loss of dominion and self-mastery.¹⁹ More recently, Kelly Olson's *Masculinity and Dress in Roman Antiquity* has provided a systematic look at dress in ancient Rome, and she usefully pinpoints specific elements of dress, perfumes, and grooming to show how the Roman man "walked a fine line" between expected grooming and dressing practice and what was considered effeminate.²⁰

As we move into the Middle Ages and Renaissance, writers adopted these Classical condemnations of men's dress and added their own brand of Christian morality. Renaissance legal codes and prescriptive literature justified the regulation of male dress under the auspices of protecting state expenditures, preventing deviant sexuality, or ensuring the salvation of the soul.²¹ For example, Francesco Pontano (fl. 1424–41), a professor in republican Siena, attacked male hair styling, cosmetics, and ornate garments as a civic and Christian moral problem.²² In his treatise *Dello integro e perfetto stato delle donzelle* (*On the whole and perfect state of girls*), a work written primarily about women's vanities, the author states that "vain and superfluous ornament" should be disdained by all males "who want to be called real men."²³ Certain men, he states, do not care if they are esteemed as masculine, and thus they spend extraordinary amounts of time on hair and skin care.²⁴ He complains that men multiply the effect of their grooming habits by fussing over dress as well: "Ma i maschi moltiplicano questo errore or co' lisciamenti or con continui increspamenti di falde, e arrondolamenti de' cappucci a diadema, e infiniti altri loro frenetichi e babionerie" (But men multiply this error, sometimes using cosmetics and at other times with their continual ruffling of crinoline and swirls of hoods in the shape of a tiara, as well as their infinite other frenzies and buffooneries) (Pontano 22). For Pontano, so-called luxurious dress muddled the gender binary as well as presented a peril to Christian morality since, as he states,

vanities and ornament debased men, who were “made to be equal to the angels” to a status “below pigs.”²⁵ Dress imperiled the body and the very soul of men. Effeminate dress, he states, showed disrespect for God. The crowd of ornate men “non crede che Dio sia, e che non sia alcuno altro iudice che quegli del podestà over del capitano” (does not believe that God exists, and that there is no other judge than the *podestà* or commander) (Pontano 22).

Pontano made so-called effeminate dress a moral and theological issue. Similarly, other writers of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries voiced concern about the morality of dress with respect to sexuality and class status. The chronicler Giovanni Villani (c. 1280–1348) worried that men's fashion could create dangerous alliances with foreign powers and blur class differences, and San Bernardino da Siena (1380–1444) complained that young men's short tunics and tight hose were too erotic.²⁶ Ironically, those same tight hose were reevaluated in the sixteenth century as evidentiary proof that the male youths of the past were uncorrupted.²⁷

There has as yet been no systematic study of the condemnations of men's dress in early modern Italy, but such a study would aid our understanding of possible thematic shifts. Not only did the targets of these condemnations vary (e.g., short tunics, tight hosiery), so too did the rhetoric used to vilify certain dress undergo changes. There seems to be one significant moment in the history of dress and masculinity at the beginning of the sixteenth century, when condemnations of so-called effeminate male dress shifted from threats of Christian imperilment to failed militancy.²⁸ The anxiety over dress and militarism had real-world implications such as the standardized military uniform, just as it may have also inspired some unexpected rhetoric, such as the praise of an unkempt look.²⁹ Most importantly, it made the abstract notions of dependency and autonomy visible; men's clothing carried the meanings of military victory or loss.

Castiglione's *Courtier* has a distinct place within the normativization process of the militaristic masculine body as it is an early—possibly the earliest—example of sixteenth-century rhetoric of effeminacy, dress, and military defeat. Castiglione began writing his text during the chaotic years between the invasion of France in 1494 and the Sack of Rome in 1527. In this period of instability, he chose to point to certain courtly behaviors, including dress, in relation to the military losses that were still potentially viewed as reversible. The *Courtier* blames the subjugation of the Italian people on certain refined masculine behaviors that were otherwise unrelated to militarism, but so, too, it suggests that the salvation of Italy lay in the hands of this same class of men, men who often marked their class by the very dress that undermined their masculinity.

There are two moments in which Castiglione suggests that men's clothing played a role in military loss. I will analyze these passages along with other textual examples of men's aesthetics and dress to demonstrate that Castiglione is in effect not only making pronouncements about dress but, more importantly, is establishing a practice whereby men can redeem their masculinity through *speaking* about the effeminizing power of aesthetics. The spoken condemnation

of courtly dress purportedly critiques gender and class structures, but like the dress itself, this very speech is what marks the speaker as belonging to the properly masculine elite.³⁰

Male aesthetics and dress in the *Courtier*

Book One: sprezzatura and gender nonconformity

In Book One, the primary speaker, Count Ludovico da Canossa, says that the ideal courtier should have a manly yet graceful face. What is to be avoided, he exclaims with disgust, are certain male grooming habits:

[your face] has something manly about it, and yet is full of grace. . . . I would have our Courtier's face be such, not so soft and feminine as many attempt to have who not only curl their hair and pluck their eyebrows, but preen themselves in all those ways that the most wanton and dissolute women in the world adopt; and in walking, in posture, and in every act, appear so tender and languid that their limbs seems to be on the verge of falling apart; and utter their words so limply that it seems they are about to expire on the spot; and the more they find themselves in the company of men of rank, the more they make a show of such manners. These, since nature did not make them women as they clearly wish to appear and be, should be treated not as good women, but as public harlots, and driven not only from the courts of great lords but from the society of all noble men.

(1.19, p. 27)

Certo quella grazia del volto, senza mentire, dir si po esser in voi . . . tien del virile, e pur è grazioso . . . di tal sorte voglio io che sia lo aspetto del nostro cortegiano, non così molle e femminile come si sforzano d'aver molti, che non solamente si crepano i capegli e spelano le ciglia, ma si strisciano con tutti que' modi che si facciano le più lascive e disoneste femine del mondo; e pare che nello andare, nello stare ed in ogni altro lor atto siano tanto teneri e languidi, che le membra siano per staccarsi loro l'uno dall'altro; e pronunziano quelle parole così afflitte, che in quel punto par che lo spirito loro finisca; e quanto più si trovano con omini di grado, tanto più usano tai termini. Questi, poiché la natura, come essi mostrano desiderare di parere ed essere, non gli ha fatti femine, dovrebbero non come bone femine esser estimati, ma, come pubbliche meretrici, non solamente delle corti de' gran signori, ma del consorzio degli omini nobili esser cacciati.

(1.19, pp. 49–50)

For Ludovico, the so-called effeminate courtiers are not by nature “*molle*” (soft) or “*femminile*” (feminine), but they work very hard (*si sforzano*) to make themselves

appear to be so. Moreover, he links aesthetics to acts of despised behavior, particularly obsequious dependency. This condemned behavior occurs when, as Ludovico explains, men affect their appearance and speech around other men of rank.

We can situate these despised men within the context of Ludovico's own theory of *sprezzatura*. Coining a new term, Ludovico describes *sprezzatura* as the art of "ciò che si fa e dice venir fatto senza fatica e quasi senza pensarvi" (1.26, p. 60) (making whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it) (1.26, p. 32).³¹ In the case of the men who plucked their eyebrows, curled their hair, and augmented certain behaviors around men of rank, they have failed at this art. Rather than concealing a performance, as *sprezzatura* demands, these men drew attention to the act of ingratiating themselves to men of authority. Their failed performance of *sprezzatura* thus resulted in the loss of reputation and power, a point also made by Ludovico in his definition of the new term:

Accordingly, we may affirm that to be true art which does not appear to be art; nor to anything must we give greater care than to conceal art, for if it is discovered, it quite destroys our credit and brings us into small esteem.
(1.26, p. 32)

Però si po dir quella esser vera arte che non pare esser arte; né più in altro si ha da poner studio, che nel nasconderla: perché se è scoperta, leva in tutto il credito e fa l'omo poco estimado.

(1.26, p. 60)

Successful *sprezzatura*, on the other hand, offered the courtier an ability to perform a "compelling" version of himself that masked a very different, perhaps less putatively masculine identity.³² This "manly masquerade," however, risked pointing to both a fantastic masculine ideal as well as to the absence of that ideal.³³

Dress and aesthetics, or more precisely, the discussions of dress and aesthetics in the *Courtier*, form a paradox in the logic of *sprezzatura*. When the speakers complain of the "effeminate" dress or grooming habits of men, they imply that some idealized masculine version of these men existed *before* the offending grooming or dressing occurred.³⁴ However, this anchoring of essentialist manhood is dismissed in the *Courtier*. Instead, the speakers reaffirm that since very few men are born with the qualities of the ideal courtier, the ideal (read masculine) courtier manipulates his body, behaviors, and dress. If the ideal courtier is therefore a man who must alter his person in order to be masculine, then the ideal masculine pre-altered courtier—much like the idealized Urbino court itself—is a pastoral fantasy.³⁵

The men who alter their hair and posture when among men of rank, in effect, draw attention to this absence of essential masculinity in all but the rarest courtiers. These men fail at a *sprezzatura* of masculinity not because they ornament

themselves, but because they have exposed the necessity of ornamenting themselves. It is so great an infraction that Ludovico angrily condemns these men to be punished not as women but as “public harlots.” Of course, the reference to prostitution is significant for it foreshadows an episode (discussed below) in Book Four where Ottaviano explains that all courtiers must use their bodies, speech, and behavior to gain princely favors. The irony is that the principal difference between the despicable groomed courtier with plucked eyebrows and the masculine courtier with less apparently plucked eyebrows is solely aesthetic; both sell themselves for favors. The offending behavior of the groomed courtier is therefore that he has failed to conceal this economy.

Book Two: foreign dress and foreign occupation

Given the gravity of the punishment that Ludovico doles out to certain courtiers, it is apparent that a mistake in styling and grooming could pose a serious threat to masculinity. Thus, choosing proper male dress also caused anxiety for the upwardly mobile courtier. In Book Two, Giuliano de' Medici expresses his personal difficulty regarding the variety of dress available to men, and he asks for assistance “to know how to choose the best out of this confusion” (2.26). Federico Fregoso responds to this question by stating that men should dress according to the “custom of the majority.” Fregoso then states that the majority of Italians wore the styles of various foreign cultures and that these foreign fashions signaled which cultures would dominate Italian men.³⁶

But I do not know by what fate it happens that Italy does not have, as she used to have, a manner of dress recognized to be Italian: for, although the introduction of these new fashions makes the former ones seem very crude, still the older ones were perhaps a sign of freedom, even as the new ones have proved to be augury of servitude . . . Just so our having changed our Italian dress for that of foreigners strikes me as meaning that all those for whose dress we have exchanged our own are going to conquer us: which has proved to be all too true, for by now there is no nation that has not made us its prey.

(2.26, pp. 88–89)

Ma io non so per qual fato intervenga che la Italia non abbia, come soleva avere, abito che sia conosciuto per italiano; che, benché lo aver posto in usanza questi novi faccia parer quelli primi goffissimi, pur quelli forse erano segno di libertà, come questi son stati augurio di servitù . . . così l'aver noi mutato gli abiti italiani nei stranieri parmi che significasse, tutti quelli, negli abiti de' quali i nostri erano trasformati, dever venire a subugarci; il che è stato troppo più che vero, ché ormai non resta nazione che di noi non abbia fatto preda.

(2.26, p. 158)

Fregoso's fashion advice poses a host of problems regarding identity and autonomy. By suggesting that men "follow the majority," he undermines agency, sovereignty, and control, themes often repeated as central to masculinity by fifteenth- and sixteenth-century authors. Manliness is the ability to look like others, to disappear in the crowd; but it is also ironically defined as following the crowd's errors. For, as Fregoso states, the majority of Italians have made a grave error and adopted foreign dress, which leads to invasion and occupation.³⁷ If fitting in is a masculine virtue, it could even mean implicating oneself in Italy's political and military losses.

Fregoso's concern about foreign dress is a Classical trope that has considerable fortune in the Renaissance, where French and later Imperial invasions were not infrequently associated with foreign fashions.³⁸ The epistemological link of fashion and invasion was so imbedded in the culture that even one hundred years after Castiglione wrote his *Courtier*, the Spanish priest Basilio Ponce de Leon suggested that God castigated Italy with invasion in 1494 precisely because Italian men wore French fashions.³⁹ Within the *Courtier* itself, foreign fashion does not incur God's wrath, but rather, it beckons other nations to "venire a subiugarci" (come and subjugate us). Such a logic—where large scores of men were responsible for invasion because of their fashion choice—stands in contrast to Ludovico's claim in Book One when he claimed that the collapse of Italy was caused by a "few men." Book Two thus broadens the guilty parties of Italy's subjugation from a "few men" to a "majority" of (upper class) men, who, like Castiglione himself, were bedecked in the latest Spanish and French trends.

Books One and Two: fashion theory and agency

The first two books are differentiated also by the way they discuss men's aesthetics. In Book One, for example, there is no association between aesthetics and military loss. Ludovico did not state that plucked eyebrows and curled hair brought about military defeat. Rather, his complaint was limited to gender non-conformity. On the other hand, Book Two draws a direct line between aesthetics (foreign dress) and military failure. This shift from Book One to Book Two might be explained by the general ideological difference that distinguishes the two books. Virginia Cox has convincingly argued that Book One proclaims that a courtier's virtue ensures him success, while in the more cynical Book Two, success at court is depicted as at the whim of the prince.⁴⁰ In particular, military bravery is praised only when it can be observed by others, particularly by the prince. To risk one's life when no one is watching would be a waste of one's personal resources. Virtue, therefore, is whatever the courtier makes seen in the eyes of others.

In the context of Book Two, where the courtiers participate in an economy that trades in appearance of virtue rather than intrinsic virtue, clothing takes a central role in masculine identity construction. It thus follows that Fregoso attempts to draw a direct relationship between appearance and essence. He states

that one must be attentive to what type of man he wishes to be taken for, and then act and dress accordingly, “aggiungendovi ancor che debba fra se stesso deliberar ciò che vol parere e de quella sorte che desidera esser estimado, della medesima vestirsi” (2.27, p. 160) (I would only add further that he ought to consider what appearance he wishes to have and what manner of man he wishes to be taken for, and dress accordingly) (2.27, p. 90). Such action is necessitated by the belief that external appearance (including mannerisms) communicates a person’s identity: “tutto questo di fuori dà notizia spesso di quel dentro” (2.28, p. 161) (all these outward things often make manifest what is within) (1.28, p. 90). The body makes legible the soul, and this externalization of virtue and morality is problematized by the fact that the courtier is taught to manipulate the body according to his fashion. One speaker, Gasparo Pallavicino, pushes back on the theory that dress determines personal character. He states that one should not “judge the character of men by their dress rather than by their words or deeds” (2.28, p. 90). To Gasparo’s comment, Fregoso responds that although deeds and words are more important than dress, dress is “no small index” (*non è piccolo argomento*) (2.28) of the man. Fregoso’s insistence that dress is reflective of the essence of man is, however, hard to reconcile with the fact that one’s projected image, as Fregoso himself states, can be false: “avvenga che talor possa esser falso” (2.28) (although it can sometimes be false) (2.28, p. 90 translation altered to reflect original).

Despite Fregoso’s suggestions otherwise, behavior, dress, and bodily adornment do not convey an unproblematic version of the self. In the elegant fishbowl of the court, courtiers manipulate dress with the hopes that others might be duped into believing that it represents an intrinsic identity. Fregoso’s fashion theory, though not cohesive, does communicate to other men that a fashion *faux pas* imperils the courtier’s masculinity in two ways: it points to a perceived essential effeminacy, or it demonstrates an inability to mask this effeminacy.

Book Four: Ottaviano’s paradox

The last mention of dress in the *Courtier* is in Book Four, and it famously gives elegance of dress a virtuous purpose. In Book Four, Federico Fregoso’s brother, Ottaviano, declares that dress, manners, and pleasantries permit the courtier access to the prince so that he can provide the ruler with wise counsel. According to Ottaviano, the courtier must fashion himself with this mask of the “perfect courtier” so that he can lead the prince away from the ills of vice through deception, “ingannandolo con inganno salutare” (beguiling him with salutary deception) (4.10, p. 213). Ottaviano’s interjection has received much scholarly attention in part because it exposes the fashioning of the perfect courtier as a performance of deceit.⁴¹ Berger, in particular, has noted how this deceit can have an effect on the integrity of the courtier:

The byproduct of the courtier’s performance is that the achievement of *sprezzatura* may require him to deny or disparage his nature. In order to

internalize the model and enhance himself by art, he may have to evacuate – repress or disown – whatever he finds within himself that doesn't fit the model.

(20)

If *sprezzatura* requires the courtier to deny or disparage his own nature, then there is an implicit notion that the courtier also risks destabilizing his identity, including his masculine identity.⁴² This is no more apparent than when we consider how a courtier's agency is compromised by the act of *sprezzatura*, an act of self-fashioning that is dependent on the will of others. Ottaviano addresses this very process head on. He states that elegance of dress, along with singing, dancing, and general enjoyment, change a man and make him effeminate. Relevant here, this effeminacy has consequences not only on a courtier's identity but also on state security:

I should say that many of those accomplishments that have been attributed to our Courtier (such as dancing, merrymaking, singing, and playing) were frivolities and vanities and, in a man of any rank, deserving of blame rather than of praise; these elegances of dress, devices, mottoes, and other such things as pertain to women and love (although many will think the contrary), often serve to merely make spirits effeminate, to corrupt youth, and to lead to a dissolute life; whence it comes about that the Italian name is reduced to opprobrium, and there are but few who dare, I will not say to die, but even to risk any danger.

(4.4, p. 210)

anzi direi che molte di quelle condicioni che se gli sono attribuite, come il danzar, festeggiar, cantar e giocare, fossero leggerezze e vanità, ed in un omo di grado più tosto degne di biasimo che di laude; perché queste attillature, imprese, motti ed altre tai cose che appartengono ad intertenimenti di donne e d'amori, ancora che forse a molti altri paia il contrario, spesso non fanno altro che effeminar gli animi, corrumper la gioventù e ridurla a vita lascivissima; onde nascono poi questi effetti che 'l nome italiano è ridotto in obbrobrio, né si ritrovano se non pochi che osino non dirò morire, ma pur entrare in uno pericolo.

(4.4, pp. 367–68)

Ottaviano's claim marks a critical shift from the other cited passages. It is the only time in the *Courtier* where clothing (along with other courtly behaviors) is described as rendering men effeminate. In Book One, distasteful grooming habits are practiced by those men who "wish" that they were women, and in Book Two, foreign dress beckons military defeat. In Book Four, clothing causes effeminacy, and the effeminized man loses wars. The passage is not only a significant moment in the *Courtier*, it is an important moment in the history of

effeminacy. To my knowledge, it is one of the earliest Renaissance texts that figures clothing and other behaviors as the agents that cause effeminacy leading eventually to military defeat.⁴³

Ottaviano's brief interjection on clothing would have provided the attentive listener with (again) some troubling fashion advice. The passage forms what I call Ottaviano's paradox: on the one hand, Ottaviano affirms that elegant dress may be necessary to ingratiate the prince and engender virtue, while on the other, he warns that dress has deleterious effects, effeminizing the courtier's soul and bringing shame to him and Italy. If the courtier performs his requisite duties (which include ingratiating the prince with dress, dancing, music, etc.), he cannot escape losing his own masculinity.

It is unclear how the reader is to navigate this paradox. Castiglione may have been genuinely concerned with the possible effeminizing effects of dress, or there may have been some irony in placing these words in the mouth of Ottaviano.⁴⁴ Ottaviano had, in fact, been derided for his unusual dress in the earlier version of the book known as the *seconda redazione* (written 1520–21).⁴⁵ Moreover, Castiglione was himself quite the fashionista. His letters tell us that he was deeply concerned with his own dress, both at court and during military operations. Many of his letters to his mother refer to his need for appropriate clothing, and on some occasions, he refers to this clothing as necessary for exercises carried out in a context of war.⁴⁶ The fact that Castiglione has left us extensive writing on dress from the period raises hermeneutical questions about Ottaviano's statement that courtly dress and activities "make spirits effeminate and corrupt youth" and eventually lead to the shame of Italy. Surely the author was not suggesting that winning wars merely a matter of changing clothing.

I propose that Castiglione was less interested in changing the garments and grooming habits of Italians than he was in investigating how the rhetoric about aesthetics functioned in defining identity and motivating social groups. His book explores how courtly practices, including dress, determined the boundaries of an elite ruling class, but so too does it explain how the language used to discuss these practices could shift the values added to such practices. Thus, Ottaviano's paradox—where the courtier is virtuous if he ingratiates the prince but loses his virtue of masculinity by doing so—is in effect a masterful demonstration of *sprezzatura*. When Ottaviano utters his words, he not only explains how courtliness denigrates a man for a virtuous cause, he also reveals how a courtier can assume an intentional and masculine participation in this virtuous cause. He derides the very courtly practices that he himself performs and then engenders them with virtue.⁴⁷ By showing that a courtier sacrifices his masculinity on the altar of state security, Ottaviano offers a reclamation of masculinity for any courtier. The trick is, however, that the courtier must be willing to decry the very practices that make him a courtier in order to claim this masculinity. Ottaviano states, in effect, "I criticize the grooming of men as effeminizing, but I will also perform these acts for the larger good of pleasing the prince."

By way of a conclusion, we will turn to this same moment in the second manuscript edition, or *seconda redazione*.⁴⁸ Here Ottaviano's passage appears in Book Three (the final book of the manuscript). It is spoken by Gasparo and, most importantly, the condemned effeminate activities are not routine courtly behavior, but belong to young courtiers in love:

Do you not believe that the young would be doing a much more praise-worthy thing if they were to concentrate on arms to defend the *patria*, their own honor, and the dignity of Italy, rather than to go around with their hair all coiffed, perfumed, and strolling through the neighborhoods with their eyes glued to the windows above without considering anything in the world except their own priorities? And what purpose do these devices and mottoes and elegances of dress serve other than vanity and frivolity? And what is the point of dancing at balls and masquerades as well as games and music (and other such things that you praise so much)? What do these things offer other than to give birth to the effeminizing of men's spirits as well as corrupting and reducing youth to a delicious and lascivious life? Whence, as Signor Ottaviano so well says, it comes about that the effect of all this is that the Italian name is reduced to opprobrium, and one cannot find a man who dares, I will not say die, but even to risk any danger. And all of this is the cause of women.

(*Translation mine*)

Non credete voi che li giovani facessero opera più laudevole, se attendessero all'arme per difender le patrie e l'onor loro e la dignità de Italia, che andar con le zazare ben pettinate, profumati, passeggiando tutto dì per le contrade, con gli occhi alle finestre senza pensare cosa alcuna di quelle che più gl'importano? e queste imprese e motti et attillature insomma a che servano altro che a vanità e leggierete? e danzare e ballare e mascare e giuochi e musiche e tai cose, fatte con tanta diligenza e che voi tanto laudate, infine che partoriscono altro che effeminare gli animi, corrompere la gioventù e ridurla a vita deliziosa e lascivissima? Onde, come ben talor dice el signor Ottaviano, ne nascono poi questi effetti che il nome italiano è ridotto in obrobrio, né si truova uomo che osi non dirò morire, ma purentrare in un pericolo. E di tutto questo sono causa le donne.

The manuscript passage, like that of the final 1528 version of the *Courtier* quoted earlier, tells us that men's dancing, games, music, and elegance of dress are dangerous to Italian sovereignty. However, there are important differences between these two textual examples. In the *seconda redazione*, dressing and music, etc. are presented as the vices specific to young lovers. This characterization of lovers fits clearly within Gasparo's stated distaste for any action that involves the courtship of women. Additionally, Gasparo explains the relationship between warfare and

effeminate behaviors in simple terms of time allocation; men should choose to spend time fighting to “defend their homelands,” but instead they focus on love. Thus, when he states that dancing, masquerades, and games effeminize men’s spirits, it follows that this causal effect is at least in part due to the fact that men are busied with these activities and not fighting.

When the author adapted the passage for the final version, he changed not the effeminizing practices but the cast of the shameful men, and he removed the phrase that explains that these practices simply took up too much of the courtiers’ time. In *Courtier* Book Four, the list of mottoes, devices, dancing, and dress are not described as what courtiers do to woo women, but rather, they are general courtly practices. Indeed, Ottaviano mentions the previous evenings’ discussions and takes aims at these activities and practices that are described by Ludovico and Fregoso in Books One and Two.⁴⁹ These courtly practices were not performed to attract only the attention of women, but also (and primarily) of men; in particular, these practices attracted the attention of other courtiers and, most importantly, the prince. What Ottaviano offers his peers is the chance to reclaim a masculinity of purpose, even while operating in a gender paradox where dress and acts necessarily effeminized the men who pursued this purpose.

Ottaviano reclaimed courtly masculinity by denigrating the necessary courtly practices and dress that enabled the courtier to pursue virtue. His accusatory rhetoric allows the disempowered male to assert masculinity even in the performance of dependency. Castiglione’s book enacted the same performance as Ottaviano’s utterance; the book as a whole takes aim at dress as effeminizing while explaining that such dress typified the ideal, masculine, and virtuous courtier. These accusations of the practices of men also served the larger function of the *Courtier*’s normativizing project, where the “few men” who were responsible for the shame of Italy might be refashioned into warrior heroes. The nagging question is just how aesthetics figured into this degradation of Italy. It is doubtful that Castiglione (or any other Renaissance writer) would suggest that changing one’s ruffles and sleeves would be the key to defeating the French or the Habsburg empire, but why, then, we should ask, did writers frame military defeat in terms of silks and ruffles? It would seem that we still have much to learn about how aesthetics and militarism functioned in the Renaissance projects of social control.

Notes

- 1 Corio, *Storia di Milano*, 2: 1398–99: “il duca se misse una corazina, quale cavò dicendo parebbe troppo grosso, puoi se vesti una veste di raso cremesino fodrata di sibelline e cinto con uno cordono di seta morella la biretta.”
- 2 McCall, “Brilliant Bodies,” 472.
- 3 Varchi, *Storia Fiorentina*, Vol. 3, Book 15, 186.
- 4 Currie, *Fashion*, Introduction.
- 5 See, for example, Simons, “Homosociality and Erotics,” Currie, *Fashion*, Biow, *On the Importance*, and Eisenbichler, “Bronzino’s Portrait.”
- 6 Paulicelli, *Writing Fashion*, 3. On masculinity and dress in the *Courtier* see Quondam, *Tutti i colori* and Currie, *Fashion*.

- 7 All Italian quotes of the *Cortegiano* are from the Garzanti edition. All English quotes are from the Javitch edition (2002) of the Singleton translation.
- 8 Najemy, "Arms and Letters." The hierarchy of arms is challenged by Ludovico himself, who states that letters are the "true and principal" adornment of the courtier. Moreover, Bembo argues that arms are actually the adornment of letters; see *ibid.*, 211.
- 9 Castiglione's references to France change from manuscript to print edition. In one of the earliest manuscript editions of the book, he calls those who do not appreciate letters, *barbari*. Pugliese, "The French Factor."
- 10 For a discussion of Machiavelli's position on arms and letters see Najemy, "Arms and Letters," 207–08. For a later discussion on the danger of letters to arms see Stefano Guazzo's "Del paragone dell'arme et delle lettere" in which an interlocutor suggests that some people fear that letters "si snervassero gli huomini Martiali," Stefano Guazzo, *Dialoghi piacevoli* (Piacenza: Pietro Tini, 1587), 167.
- 11 See Albury, *Castiglione's Allegory*, 65.
- 12 Ludovico is here discussing the influence of literature on war rather than the study of combat manuals. On Urbino's master at arms, Piero Monte, who published the "first significant combat manual ever to be printed," see Anglo, *The Martial Arts*, 133.
- 13 My reading on this passage differs from Najemy's, which argues that Ottaviano, in Book Four, implicates the courtiers as the few bad men, responsible for Italy's decline.
- 14 In Book One, Gasparo states that music and other "vanities" "effeminar gli animi" of men. Quondam's published edition of Manuscript (L) Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Ashburnhamiano 409 shows that Castiglione originally phrased his concerns differently, without using the word "effeminize": "e cosi fatte illecebre enervare gli animi." Quondam, *Il libro del Cortegiano*.
- 15 On hegemonic masculinity, see Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.
- 16 Although warfare is typically shown to be endangered by courtly behaviors, there are some moments in which the court is shown to be negatively affected by the presence of warriors; see Book I.17.
- 17 Newton, *Fashion*, 1–5; Blanc, "From Battlefield to Court."
- 18 On effeminacy in the *Courtier* see Milligan, "The Politics of Effeminacy." On effeminacy in the study of pre-modern texts, see Halperin, "How to Do."
- 19 Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, 125–58.
- 20 Olson, *Masculinity and Dress*; see chapter four in particular.
- 21 See Blanc, "From Battlefield to Court" for a discussion about several fourteenth-century chronicles that blame a sudden change in dress for battles and plague. See also Muzzarelli, *Breve storia*; Mosher Stuard, *Gilding the Market*; Sebreghondi, "Clothes and Teenagers"; Muzzarelli, *Guardaroba Medievale*.
- 22 Francesco Pontano, along with his brother Ludovico Pontano, was a professor at the university of Siena. On Francesco Pontano see Marletta, "L'umanista Francesco Pontano."
- 23 "Il quale tanto più è vituperoso in loro in quanto debbono in tutto essere rimoti da ogni vano e superfluo ornamento, s'eglino debbono e vogliono esser detti veri maschi." Pontano, "*Dello integro e perfetto stato*," 22. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.
- 24 "Li quali non minor tempo e industria mettono raschiamenti di coteche e scialbamenti di gote e di collo e de' vari pelatogi e scorticatogi, e di bionde e d'acque sublimate e stillate, che si facciano le femine." *Ibid.*
- 25 "Talc'hé oggidì l'uomo che fu fatto presso che pari agli angeli 'e di sotto a' porci e a qualunque altro sporco e vile animale." *Ibid.* On dress and gender confusion in early modern England see the essays by Epstein and Straub, *Body Guards*.
- 26 See Sebreghondi, "Clothes and Teenagers," which shows how preachers such as San Bernardino da Siena complained about the erotic elements of tight hose and short doublets. *Ibid.*, 31 cites Sermon 37 of *Prediche di San Bernardino* vol. 3.
- 27 Sebreghondi, "Clothes and Teenagers," 36.
- 28 Not all writers condemned male dress. Leonardo Fiorivanti states that the only way to make this "miserable world" better is to dress well and eat well, and that young men dress extravagantly and then change their dress when they reach the age to marry and

- have children. Fiorivanti, *Dello specchio*, Book I, chapter 9, 27. On the other hand, Anton Francesco Doni (1513–74) and Scipione Ammirato (1531–1601) both criticize military failings while discussing men's dress and aesthetics.
- 29 In language that is contrary to modern notions of military discipline, writers such as Pio De Rossi (1581–1667) suggested that the most courageous warriors were slovenly, dirty, and untidy. De Rossi, *Convito morale*, 42. On Rossi see Biondi, "Il Convito."
- 30 This mechanism functions similarly to the "hypocritical rhetoric of self-censorship" identified by Carla Freccero in that an utterance pretends to do one thing while performing a different function. Freccero, "Politics and Aesthetics," 271.
- 31 On scholarly interpretations of sprezzatura see Javitch; Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances*; and Berger Jr., *The Absence of Grace*.
- 32 On the "more compelling figure" see Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances*, 38; on the virility of sprezzatura see Berger, *Absence of Grace*, 11.
- 33 I borrow the term "manly masquerade" from Finucci, *The Manly Masquerade*.
- 34 How Renaissance writers characterized the pre-dressed (naked) man as masculine or effeminate is discussed by Paulicelli, *Writing Fashion*, ch. 3.
- 35 According to Berger, Castiglione casts an idyllic, unreal version of Urbino. Berger describes how Castiglione discloses to the reader his process of casting Urbino as unreal in a "metapastoral" gesture Berger, *Absence of Grace*, 119–78.
- 36 On this passage see Quondam, *Questo povero cortegiano* and Milligan, "The Politics of Effeminacy."
- 37 See Currie, *Fashion*; Paulicelli, *Writing Fashion*.
- 38 On Classical examples see Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*. Castiglione himself cites an ancient anecdote of Darius III, King of Persia (336–330 B.C.), told by Q. Curtius Rufus, *Historiarum Alexandri Magni III*, 6. For Renaissance examples see Lando, *Brieve essortatione*, which states that the Syrians have dominated the Italians through their perfumes, and Lampugnani claims that Italians follow French fashions like monkeys, *Della carrozza da nolo*. Lampugnani also complains of women who seek to "dis-Italianize" themselves by adopting foreign fashions.
- 39 De Leon, *Discorsi novi*, published in Spanish in 1605. "E, quando in Italia cominciarono a vestirsi all'usanza di Francia, molti ciò mirando con prudenza temerono, che i Francesi havessero a mal trattargli; e non s'ingannò l'anima loro, come fra pochi giorni mostrò il successo. Di modo che la natione, che lascia la sua foggia di vestito antica, e naturale per imitare quella de' Regni stranieri, ben può temere, che Dio non la castighi con guerre, persecutione, rubamenti, e mali trattamenti che le faranno fatti da coloro, i cui habiti ella va imitando," 628.
- 40 Cox, *The Renaissance Dialogue*, 54.
- 41 On Ottaviano's interjection see Rebhorn, *Courtly Performances*, Albury, *Castiglione's Allegory*, and Quondam, *Questo povero cortegiano*.
- 42 Berger does not characterize courtliness as weak or effeminizing; he instead states that the successful performance of sprezzatura demonstrates a certain virile mastery. Berger, *Absence of Grace*, 1–12.
- 43 In his "Education of Boys" Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini suggests that clothing can make boys soft and effeminate. He particularly warns against feathers and silk. Piccolomini, "The Education of Boys," 71. Basilio Ponce de Leon, *Discorsi* (Italian Translation 1614) suggests that clothing makes spirits effeminate and soft "Legislatori antichi giudicarono così (e la isperienza lo insegna) che non tanta delicatezza di vestiti si assottigliano gli animi, e di virile, e forti divengono bassi effeminate e molli," 626.
- 44 Some assert that Ottaviano's response might be due to his "republican" leanings. This seems to be overstated given that Ottaviano was the nephew of Guidobaldo de Montefeltro, spent much of his childhood at the Urbino court, and was himself a prince of Sant'Agata Feltria.
- 45 In response to how a courtier should dress, Federico responds "Voi lasciate una sorte de abiti che se usa, e pur non si contengano tra alcuni di questi che voi avete ricordati, e sono quegli del signor Ottaviano." Castiglione, *Seconda redazione*, II.26, 110.

- 46 See, for example, letters 29 and 30. Castiglione, *Le lettere*, vol. I, 1497–1521.
- 47 Ottaviano's censoring of courtly dress follows Carla Freccero's analysis of "'hypocritical' rhetoric of self-censorship," in that it is as much about establishing identity groups as it is about a sincere rebuke of argument. Freccero, "Politics and Aesthetics," 271.
- 48 For a useful review of the manuscript revisions to the text, see Pugliese, *Castiglione's "The Book of the Courtier"*, 15–24.
- 49 "Estimo io adunque che 'l cortegiano perfetto di quel modo che descritto l'hanno il conte Ludovico e messer Federico, possa esser veramente bona cosa e degna di laude; non però semplicemente né per sé, ma per rispetto del fine al quale po essere indirizzato" (4.4) Castiglione, *Il libro del Cortegiano*, ed. Nicola Longo, 367.

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9

THE SAUSAGE WARS

Or how the sausage and *carne* battled for gastronomic and social prestige in Renaissance literature and culture

Laura Giannetti

In Girolamo Parabosco's comedy *La fantesca* (published in 1556) the sexual activities of a maid, the young cross-dressed Pandolfo who impregnated his young lover Giacinta, were humorously referred to with a culinary metaphor, that of inserting meat in the oven:

People, the female servant has become a male in two houses at once as you have seen. And she has shown that she is a better cook than a housekeeper, because she knew better how to put the meat (*carne*) in the oven than make beds or sweep the house.

(*V*, c. 94)¹

The Italian word *carne* with its multiple meanings of meat, flesh, and the masculine sexual organ commonly served as a tool for clever word play in Italian literature from the *Decameron* to the *Canti carnascialeschi* and enjoyed a renaissance of its own in sixteenth-century comic prose, poetry, letters, and everyday language.²

The early modern dietary corpus reinforced the religious association between eating meat, gluttony, and lust. All nutritious food, in particular meat, created more blood than needed by the body; therefore the surplus translated into an extra production of sperm, which in turn fueled the sex drive.³ A traditional view of the link between gluttony and lust holds that biblical accounts of the Fall considered gluttony the opening door to lust, although the Garden of Eden's transgression consisted in eating the forbidden fruit, a fig or an apple according to different versions, and not eating immoderately. Many medieval theologians and then Pope Gregory the Great, a medieval doctor of the Church, defined gluttony mainly as a desire to stimulate the palate with delicacies, while also exceeding what was considered necessary for basic nourishment and health.⁴ But then he drew a more precise connection between the two sins and different

organs of the body: “when the first (stomach) fills up excessively, inevitably, the other are also excited to sin.”⁵ Gluttony excites the senses and therefore can carry the sinner to sins of the flesh. In Dante’s *Inferno*, and following Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, incontinence (of desire) was the link between gluttony and lust. Paolo and Francesca in Canto V are among the “peccator *carnali*, / che la ragion sommettono al talento” [Inf. 5.38–39]). Although for Dante gluttony was a sin worse than lust, the common vision at his time was that eating immoderately and lusting were both sins of *carne*, the flesh.⁶

If early theologians’ readings discussed gluttony without referring to a particular food, it was meat that later became the preferred target of moralists and came to be associated with ideas of lasciviousness and lust. Traditionally, animals such as the boar, pig, wolf, and/or ape in late medieval and early Renaissance visual and prescriptive sources represented *luxuria*⁷ and gluttony, as inextricably and negatively bonded together.⁸ Sixteenth-century prints, paintings, broadsheets, and emblem books kept those associations alive in society and culture even as the associations between those animals and gluttony or voracity often surpassed their association with *luxuria*.⁹ Sins of the flesh were often symbolized as sins of *carne* in the sense of meat.¹⁰ But before delving into the imaginative perceptions and symbolism attributed to meat-eating it is advisable to recall briefly what the lived practice and experience of consuming meat in medieval and Renaissance Italy involved.

Symbol of power and violence, masculinity and aggressive sexuality, luxury and abundance, meat was often associated with the aristocracy and its lifestyle.¹¹ As Massimo Montanari and Alberto Capatti have shown, in the Middle Ages the noble table first saw a triumph of big game gained through hunting but later the preference was directed more toward smaller game such as pheasants, quails, and/or farmed animals, like geese and capons. The new court nobility of the twelfth century no longer identified with the warriors’ taste for big, bloody game.¹² Gross and nutritious meat was now left to peasants, usually in the form of pork. City dwellers also enjoyed the meat of the pig in the form of sausages but strove to differentiate themselves from the rural inhabitants by buying and eating veal, beef, and small birds. Although Fernand Braudel famously called “carnivore” the period in Europe between 1350 and 1550,¹³ Italians of the period had other food resources and could not, and often did not care to eat meat every day. Nonetheless, eating meat, and especially good meat, remained an indicator of social elevation and offered the promise of good health.

The preference of the new court nobility for small birds and farmed animals received the approval of contemporary doctors, who exalted birds as a source of exceptional nutritional value, with the caveat that it was best suited to an aristocratic diet.¹⁴ It was not just the symbolic and nutritional value that was considered important; in dietetic tracts partridges and quails excelled also for their delicate taste and their lightness. But not all agreed. Vatican librarian and gastronome Platina (1421–81) was more open to the pleasures of eating a much wider range of meats, demonstrating more catholic tastes. His *De Honesta Voluptate et Valetudine*

(first Italian edition 1487) is full of numerous recipes that included poultry, organ meats, fowl, pork, and sausages. Still much like many doctors, cooks, and courts stewards, he agreed that meat in general was a food healthier than others and had an elevated nutritional value.¹⁵

The reputation of meat as a primary source of nourishment and good health continued in the sixteenth century, and was particularly strong among surgeons, medical practitioners, and professors of “secrets.” A Spanish “surgeon and empirical doctor”¹⁶ who lived in Rome, Giovan Battista Zapata (ca. 1520–86), claimed that all meat products sustained good health, as long as they were roasted with a rosemary oil and a mixture of other herbs and spices, and were accompanied by good wine.¹⁷ Zefiriele Tommaso Bovio (1521–1609)—a Veronese nobleman and lawyer who later became a medical practitioner—wrote a treatise at the end of the sixteenth century against the “*medici rationali*” who wanted to impose a strict meatless diet on sick people. He claimed that doctors knew that eating good meat and drinking wine had the power to restore health but kept the secret to themselves for fear of losing fees from patients who recovered from illness and stayed healthy eating meat.¹⁸

The nutritional value of meat was thought to rest on the idea that meat could transform into the substance, the very *carne*, of the human body. The steward Domenico Romoli affirmed in his cooking manual that those who invented the eating of meat did it both for taste but especially for health reasons: they knew that “more than any other food, it is meat (*carne*) that makes flesh (*carne*).”¹⁹ In his view eating meat meant literally giving nutriment to human flesh.²⁰ Renouncing meat, however, was a crucial requirement for early Christian hermits and monks. It represented unequivocally the mortification of the flesh and contempt for the body, although numerous sources show that meat-eating in many monasteries was fairly normal. In general, the suspicion of meat running through Christian texts in the period appeared to be based on an association of the eating of meat with fears of the flesh and sexual incontinence.

San Bernardino’s preaching in the fifteenth century aggressively linked meat consumption with unruly sexuality and was particularly severe on policing widows and youths’ eating practices. He represented the extreme side of a widespread religious censure of culinary pleasures and the sense of taste, emphasizing the presumed dangers of uniting desire for meat and unruly sexuality.²¹ Outside of the monastic world, religious proscriptions on food dictated that for periods of fasting, such as Lent, abstinence from animal flesh, meat, poultry, and eggs, was mandatory to mortify the body and its appetites. And Lent was not just the forty days that followed Carnival; every Friday and many vigils during the year were Lenten days when meat was proscribed as well.²²

How much weight did this religious censure or the ideology of the ascetic abstention from eating meat actually have? Apparently not much in everyday life or culture. The desire for meat, originally condemned as gluttony and a carnal practice that took one away from the life of the spirit, was often identified in the

literary imagination with positive expressions of sexual desire. The longstanding Christian prohibition against eating meat associated gluttony and illicit sexuality, and the Galenic dietary theory reinforced this, claiming that the body of the meat eater would have a surplus of blood and thus an increased sex drive. Literary sources valorized the gastronomic desirability and sexual powers promised by eating meat. Slowly but surely the sexual/alimentary play on *carne* as food and flesh, positively portrayed in imaginative literature and culture of the sixteenth century, battled successfully against earlier moralistic discourses insisting on restraint of the body and its instincts.²³ The emerging cultural war of the period opposed a disciplining view of the body and posited the increasing importance of pleasure and taste in both life and literature, with the enjoyment of meat, *carne* and flesh, at their very center.

Appetite for meat in literature

Returning to the courtly taste for birds in the Renaissance, the link between eating birds and the lustful consequences that followed was visible in literary texts, fresco cycles, and dietary discourses, albeit with different meanings. While Dantesque *Inferno* punishment scenes in late medieval Italian dietary treatises and church fresco cycles dwelt on the negative consequences of eating birds or eating too much meat, literary texts presented a competing discourse. Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*, *novelle* collections such as those by Niccolò Sacchetti (ca. 1332–1400), Giovanni Sercambi (1348–1424), Anton Francesco Grazzini (1503–84), and Niccolò Bandello (1485–1561), and many satirical and licentious poems, all exploited the phallic meat metaphor to elicit laughter as well as sexually allusive word-play.²⁴ Boccaccio made clear in his *Conclusione* to the *Decameron* that the obscene language he had used came from everyday usage and included words from the culinary world:

It is not more shameful that I have written words that men and women spell out continuously such as hole, peg, mortar, pestle, sausage, and mortadello.

Dico che più non si dee a me esser disdetto d'averle scritte che generalmente si disdica agli uomini e alle donne di dir tutto di foro e caviglia e mortaio e pestello e salsiccia e mortadello.

Many contemporary tales depict adulterous lovers or lovers-to-be enjoying meals with game, fowl, and poultry in preparation for the carnal pleasures to come. The “*carne*” metaphor to designate the male member had a notable literary tradition. Giovanni Sercambi's *Novelliere* (written ca. 1390–1402) presents many instances of the metaphorical/sexual use of the word *carne*, in some cases distinguishing between “raw” and “cooked” meat to indicate the male sexual organ and actual meat.²⁵ In the *novella* “Frate Puccio e Madonna Alisandra,” Pseudo-Sermini²⁶ plays on the double meanings of food and sex and the pleasure

of tasting the meat and its flavor.²⁷ The metaphor of “fresh meat” to indicate the male sexual organ continued unabated in the sixteenth century as seen in a laughing *novella* by the Sienese Pietro Fortini (ca. 1500–ca. 1562) where a lusty friar offers a pound of “*carne fresca*” for free to a young woman with the excuse that religion does not let him enjoy meat that day. The *novella* naturally ends with the friar being beaten by the woman’s husband and with the laughter of the *brigata* listening to the story.²⁸

The offer of an attractive bird for a meal often opened the way to a carnal relationship. In one sixteenth-century *novella* by Grazzini, the priest Agostino, enamored of his parishioner Bartolomea, decided to entice her with the offer of a large and plump duck. Bartolomea, who was a woman of “easy taste” (*buona cucina*), let him inside her house and made love to him with the hope of gaining the duck. But the early return of her husband allowed the priest to escape with his duck, leaving her literally empty handed. Agostino bragged cleverly that she would never find another duck, or another member, so large and plump. But, as often happens in Italian *novelle*, women were cleverer than their lovers. Bartolomea was no exception; when Agostino came back with a duck and two capons to make peace and love again, she got her revenge. With the help of her husband she beat him and sent him away barely able to walk, keeping the birds to enjoy with her husband.²⁹ In this *novella*, birds carried out their multiple roles: they were an enticing and valued meat, able to stimulate the senses at many levels but also able to transform gluttony and lust into laughter and pleasure.

In sixteenth-century comedies, birds such as partridges and pheasants could serve as domestic aphrodisiacs, for both old men and young. In Donato Giannotti’s comedy *Il vecchio amoroso* (written ca. 1533–36), old Teodoro, in love with the young female slave his son has brought home from Sicily, organizes a banquet where the food includes delicacies like fat capons, birds (*starnie*), and pigeons, served with wine and sweets, in order to prepare him for the rigors of lovemaking.³⁰ The meat of birds was believed to arouse lust because it was seen as hot and moist; for this reason Messer Nicomaco, in the comedy *Clizia*, plans to eat a half bloody pigeon before his night of love with the young Clizia. Perhaps because of this popular belief, or perhaps because it was the most prized and elegant type of meat, Pietro Aretino, in one of his letters from Venice in 1547, invites the painter Titian to a dinner at his house with a famous courtesan, Angela Zaffetta, promising that the main dish to be served would be roasted pheasants.³¹

Adulterous lovers with their lascivious dinners were the protagonists of a great number of plays and *novella*. Some specific language used in sixteenth-century poetry, dialogues, and comedies also suggested that the desire for meat was closely connected to the practice of sodomy.³² A type of meat that was used euphemistically to signify sodomy, either with men or women, was the young male goat or “*capretto*.” Pietro Aretino in his *Ragionamento* (1534) used the masculine gender and the diminutive form of “*capretto*” to indicate the act of sodomy

with a nun, in obvious contrast with the word “*capra*,” the adult goat used to refer to vaginal sex. In describing a moment at an orgy in a convent, Aretino exploited the culinary metaphor of meat to its fullest:

Tired, at the first morsel of the goat he asked for the young goat . . . I tell [you] that as soon as he got it, he stuck inside the meat knife and madly enjoyed seeing it in and out . . .

stucco al primo *boccone della capra*, dimandò il *capretto* [. . .] dico che ottenuto il capretto, e fittoci dentro il *coltello proprio da cotal carne*, godea come un pazzo del vederlo *entrare e uscire*.

(*Emphasis mine*)³³

Matteo Bandello similarly narrates a tale about Niccolò Porcellio, humanist, poet, and historian at the court of Francesco Sforza in Milan, and well known for his notorious passion for young boys. Bandello expresses Porcellio’s desire with the culinary euphemism: he loved “la carne del capretto molto più che altro cibo” (he always preferred the meat of the young male goat much more than any other food). In his final confession, he justified his vice as the most natural thing in the world because it corresponded to his natural taste, and it was a “*buon boccone*”:

Oh, oh, Reverend Father, you did not know how to interrogate me. Playing with young boys is for me more natural than eating or drinking to a man . . . go away as you do not know what a good morsel is . . .

oh, oh padre reverend, voi non mi sapeste interrogare. Il trastullarmi con i fanciulli a me è più *naturale che non è il mangiar a il ber a l’uomo* . . . andate andate che voi non sapete che cosa sia un *buon boccone*.³⁴

Porcellio insisted that his sexual behavior—the preference for young male goat meat—was as natural as it was natural to eat and drink for humans. His narrator Bandello explained first that Porcellio was forced to marry by the Duke in order to soften the opinion people had of him as someone who always preferred “the meat of young goat.”³⁵ The food metaphor, so widely employed in the *novella*, was indeed perfect to address his sexual desire as a manifestation of taste, which can vary according to different people.

Contemporary literature of the Land of Cockaigne included fantastic maps of *Cuccagna* [Cockaigne in Italy] where meat, in all of its incarnations, for rich and for poor, was center stage, while the theatrical *Battaglia fra Quaresima e Carnevale* regularly ended with the victory of Carnival and meat eating.³⁶ The *carne* of the lascivious goat and luxurious hot birds were generally enjoyed by the rich. Yet it was the meat of the more humble pig, in the form of sausages that became dominant in sixteenth-century literature as a food easily conducive to sexual play, gastronomical delights, and a festive world.

The triumph of the sausage

The *Allegory of Autumn* by Niccolò Frangipane, a follower of Titian, is a remarkable painting displaying a lascivious satyr who sticks one finger into a split melon and with his other hand grabs a sausage on top of a table full of other autumn produce. In the cultural imaginary and in the common understanding of the period, that sausage in hand proclaimed with a perverse smile that it was known as a type of meat that promised and was well suited for indulgence, alimentary and sexual.³⁷

The metaphorical use of the term “*salsiccia*” was not new. Many tales in Sercambi’s *Novelliere*, fifteenth-century carnival songs, and humorous and popular print allegories of Carnival used the same metaphor associating the consumption of meat/sausages with the pleasures of the senses, especially sexual pleasures. In one *novella* by Sercambi, a libidinous widow living with her brother, who had not arranged for her to marry again, realizes that there is a similarity between the sausages her brother brought home and the instrument with which her dead husband had made her happy. She decides to satisfy “the need she had of a man” using those sausages as an instrument of pleasure and consumes them little by little until discovered by her brother.³⁸ A popular sixteenth-century print studied by Sara Matthews-Grieco shows an old lower-class woman selling a sausage during Carnival, just before the time of Lent, when both meat and sexual intercourse will have to be forgotten. While Sercambi’s humorous *novella* does not attack the widow, who is described as young and naturally deprived of sexual pleasure, the prints and grotesque portraits studied by Matthews-Grieco, more often cruelly satirize old lower-class women desirous of sausages.³⁹

Pork occupied a particular cultural space in the realm of meat of the time. Far from high-class birds, or middle-class poultry and veal, the pork sausage was the food of the poor, the peasant, or at best, the uneducated.⁴⁰ Sausages, particularly pork sausages, were a food appealing to taste but otherwise problematic as gross, humid, full of fat, and unsuited to a delicate stomach—or so claimed several early modern doctors and apothecaries. Humoral physiology dictated that the flesh of a hot and humid animal would be beneficial only to a person with a cold temperament who needed to adjust his/her complexion: people with predominantly moist/hot humors should therefore avoid pork.⁴¹

Practice was, however, more complex. Some doctors associated with the Galenic revival of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries promoted the meat of pig as nutritious and easy to digest, although more suited to physical workers. In fact, for all the undesirable characteristics noted, the idea that pork was nourishing and healthful enjoyed wide circulation in dietaries and medical treatises. From there, it was added as a significant qualifier to the traditionally unfavorable descriptions of pigs, and ultimately found its way into comic and burlesque literature, where it merged with the well-established carnivalesque passion for fat meat and gastronomical excess. The Galenic revival maintained descriptions

of pork as gross and humid, but gave more positive press by affirming that it was a nutritious meat. Indeed, despite these warring visions, the sausage and pork continued to win their battles in both literature and life.⁴²

Even with their negative medical and social reputation, sausages had had their partisans in the gastronomical world for at least two centuries. Platina provided a general and expected warning against the meat of pork at the beginning of Book VI (“you will find pork not healthful whatever way you cook it”) but then offered three recipes for sausages, all derived from maestro Martino: pork liver sausages, blood sausages, and the range of sausages known as the *Lucanica*.⁴³ Platina was more interested in showing how to cook and smoke the meat of pork than in talking about social suitability. He included an elaborate recipe for roast piglet stuffed with a mixture of herbs, garlic, cheese, and ground pepper, beaten eggs, slowly cooked over a grill. At the end of this tempting recipe, he added the usual medical advice: “The roast piglet is of poor and little nourishment, digests slowly, and harms the stomach, head, eyes, and liver.”⁴⁴ While the roast piglet was ostensibly not a fare suitable for higher classes, Platina’s detailed recipe and the ingredients used meant that the medical proscriptions against pork were losing ground to the culinary practices of courts and an emerging gastronomical culture. In a similar way, Marsilio Ficino, who considered pork a meat more suitable to laborers who already had pig-like physical features, admitted that dressing pork with expensive and luxurious spices could transform it into a valuable food.⁴⁵

Significantly, in this vein, a testimony by Cristofaro da Messisbugo (late fifteenth-century–1548), steward at the court of the Este in Ferrara, showed how dressing up pork and sausages elevated such meat above its common status as a food prescribed for rustic people. Messisbugo’s cookbook, *Banchetti, composizioni di vivande et apparecchio generale* (published in 1549), exalted the famous “*salama da sugo*,” still today a renowned Ferrarese specialty. In his recipe he explained how the less noble parts of pork were mixed together with expensive spices such as cloves, nutmeg, and cinnamon to create a dish that the Este family appreciated. Apparently, the *salama* was served especially at wedding banquets because of the reputed aphrodisiacal quality of its spicy sauce.⁴⁶ Sex, pleasure, and taste were clearly winning battles for the once-humble sausage.

The *salsiccia*, fresh or cured, also took center stage among a group of bawdy poems on fruit, vegetables, and other humble foods, authored by three of the most representative poets writing in the bernesque style, Anton Francesco Grazzini, Agnolo Firenzuola (1493–1543), and Mattio Franzesi (ca. 1500–ca. 1555). Firenzuola composed a *canzone*, and Grazzini and Franzesi *capitoli*, praising pork sausage for its alimentary and sexual properties, and demonstrating its social primacy over “superior” foods such as pheasants and capons. And, as if in a philosophical debate, these poems regularly elicited long, scholarly, and often obscene prose comments. The erotic allusions of their verses were clearly associated with the consumption of meat during Carnival, suggesting both the literal consumption of *carne* as meat and of *carne* as flesh of a more sexual variety.⁴⁷ As we have already

seen, pig meat had a mixed reputation because it was considered dangerous on one hand and nutritious on the other. Imaginative literature built upon medical and gastronomical culture to produce a more complex vision that allowed considerable room for ambiguity and ambivalence. Pork never entirely lost its reputation for promoting debased gluttony and pig-like manners, but it also gained a more positive reputation as a pleasurable food suitable for both peasants *and* upper classes to enjoy, as these poems demonstrate.⁴⁸

The “Canzone del Firenzuola in lode della salsiccia,” written between 1534 and 1538 by the Florentine poet and dramatist,⁴⁹ boasts of the primacy of his writing on the sausage and plays on the double erotic sense: “Since no fanciful poet / has dared yet / to fill his gorge with the sausage” (“poi ch’alcun capriccioso / anchor non è stato oso / de la salsiccia empirsi mai la gola”).⁵⁰ He concludes with an invocation to the *canzone* itself to go and tell the poets’ friends in Florence the secrets of this most perfect food.⁵¹ Probably written in Rome while he was a member of the academy known as the *Virtuosi*⁵² and followed by an ironic prose commentary signed by a mysterious Grappa,⁵³ the poem recognizes its affiliation with the bernesque poets. Yet it humorously affirms that they deserved an herb crown on their head because they lauded the oven, figs, and “boiled chestnuts” but not the sausage, “the most perfect food.”⁵⁴

Firenzuola presented the pork sausage produced in Bologna as a food worthy of poets but good also for rich priests and lords, learned men, and beautiful women. He argued that it had a better reputation than the highest priced meat of the time, veal. The poem blended sexual innuendos and gastronomical discussion in its overtly simple description of how to make the sausage. And following the bernesque tradition, it mocked doctors’ recommendations about when to eat certain foods and reassured readers that the sausage “is good roasted and boiled, for lunch or for dinner, before or after the meal”; all these prepositions suggested different parts of the body and different types of sexual intercourse.⁵⁵ Firenzuola then adds what he labels a “beautiful secret”: never use the sausage during the hot months of summer but wait until August has passed. According to Aristotelian physiology, men who are already by nature hot and dry are less potent in the summer when the excessive heat of the season takes away their sexual force.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, he argues that even old men who have lost their heat can be young again thanks to the mighty sausage.⁵⁷

Finally, and appropriately, for his reportedly polymorphous tastes, Firenzuola concluded that one could make sausages with “every type of meat,” referring to all possible sexual practices.⁵⁸ The sausage’s morphology, then, links it to the male member and to its features that could be seen both as gastronomic and sexual:

Sausages were ordered from above / to amuse those who were born into the world / with that grease that often drips from them; and when they are cooked and swelled / you can serve them in the round dish, although a few today want them with the split bread.

Fur le salsiccia ab aeterno ordinate / per trastullar chi ne veniva al mondo / con quell'unto che cola da lor spesso; et quando elle son cotte e rigonfiate, le si mettono in tavola nel tondo. / Altri son, che le vogliono nel pan fesso, / ma rari il fanno adesso; / che il tondo inver riesce più pulito, / né come il pan, succia l'untume tutto.⁵⁹

When a sausage is cooked and ready to serve, Firenzuola advised, it would be best to display it on the table “*nel tondo*” (the round dish and, metaphorically, the bottom) although others preferred it served with the “*pan fesso*” (split bread or, metaphorically again, a woman’s genitals). But there are few who prefer the latter today, Firenzuola added. As a Florentine, he prefers the domestic Florentine sausage, large and firm, red and natural, and encased in clean skin. The metaphors roasted or boiled and the adjectives “*tondo*” and “*fesso*” (round and split/foolish), refer to sodomitical and heterosexual encounters, while also alluding to different gastronomical appetites. The poem concludes in an ecumenical and procreative tone, affirming that the creation of sausages was intended to give pleasure and utility to everyone, but in the end the good sausages would always be the reason why men and women were born into this world.⁶⁰

Firenzuola’s poem affirms that while the sausage is for everybody and every taste, gustatory and sexual, when served “after” and roasted it is good only for upper classes. Like other bernesque poets, he seems eager to assign a higher social status to this “popular” (and economic) food. In fact, usually it was roasted fowl and roasted meat that was theoretically reserved for upper classes. Since he is suggesting sodomy with the reference to roasted meat, that sexual practice is seen as the nobler activity, although forbidden. Elevating a lower-class food to a higher status was the perfect metaphor for speaking in favor of sodomy and introducing social values along with the sexual.

What function did this type of poetic imagery serve in a period when sodomy was a crime and even the depiction of non-sodomitical sexual acts in an artistic work such as *I Modi* proved to be so controversial? It seems likely that images had more power to move viewers than writings, but in an era of printing reproduction, cheap copies of poetry, like the one produced in the *Vignaiuoli* and *Virtuosi* circle, could circulate outside an intended audience of intellectuals and fellow poets. It is therefore difficult to assess the impact of these texts, but the humor and the metaphorical language dedicated to meat, vegetables, and fruits may have helped allay the anxiety among authorities, both religious and civic, about the diffusion and circulation of writings exalting sodomy.⁶¹

The long *Capitolo in lode della salsiccia* by Anton Francesco Grazzini, which is followed by an erudite and playful prose commentary by the same author, extolled the sausage mainly from a gastronomical point of view, humorously contrasting its attractions with moralizing medical lore, and interweaving it once again with sexual innuendos.⁶² Presenting himself as a knowledgeable gastronome, Grazzini also praised the primacy of the Florentine sausage, superior to capons, partridges, and all the meat of birds, as well as to highly prized fish

such as lampreys and eels.⁶³ After defining it as a meal worthy of poets and emperors, and begging Greece and Rome to recognize the superiority of the sausage made in Florence, Grazzini once again lauded its colors and its appearance. In addition, much like the cookbooks of his day, he listed its ingredients: well-ground lean meat and fat from the pig, salt and pepper, cloves, cinnamon, oranges, and fennel, all stuffed in a case of animal intestines.⁶⁴ However, he clarified that his intent was not to explain how to make it but to laud the sausage's beauty, taste, and goodness. And citing the process of stuffing, "imbudellar la carne," Grazzini took the opportunity to shift the poem from the culinary to the sexual. He saluted women who always wanted to have their body full of sausages because they are good and healthy—another battle won in the same sausage wars.⁶⁵

The prose *Comento sopra il Capitolo della salsiccia di maestro Niccodemo dalla Pietra al Migliaio*, also authored by Grazzini, makes clear that although women love the sausage, the double sense is again a reference to sodomy. The "buona carne," well done, well cut, and making a good show when displayed in the round dish, once again is a pretext to laud the male bottom. Furthermore, the view of the *tagliere* wins over all the other poetic images (including those taken from fragments of Petrarch's poems) such as eyes, hair, breasts, or feet of Beatrice and Laura.⁶⁶ A long section of the *Comento* on the gastronomical virtues of pork begins with a verse from a sonnet by Petrarch dedicated to the name of Laura: "O d'ogni riverentia et d'honor degna." In this line he humorously shifts abruptly from Petrarch's words honoring his beloved Laura to the more mundane culinary and sexual wonders of pork, the only meal worthy of poets and emperors.⁶⁷ Even Petrarch's untouchable Laura takes her blows in the sausage wars.

Throughout the long prose comment on his own poem on the pork sausage, Grazzini attacked Petrarchan poetry and current medical lore regarding sausages and pork's meat. The playful observations on the ability of the sausage to heal every illness—while maintaining a sexual overtone—reads like a learned medical prescription listing several herbs and substances used by apothecaries to prepare their *confetti*, pills, and tonic drinks.⁶⁸ Yet Grazzini also made the straightforward culinary point that Florentine pork and lard, key ingredients in their sausages, were exceptionally good for roasting and frying as well as the essential ingredient for making the popular bread with lard called *pan unto*. The attraction to lard, the white fat of pork, was echoed in a poem by the author and translator Lodovico Dolce (1508–68), "Salva la verità, fra i decinove,"⁶⁹ dedicated to a gift of wild boar he had received from a friend. This wild pork is defined as "a magnificent and regal gift" whose rich fatty flavor "will make Abstinence die of gluttony and Carnival lick his fingers."⁷⁰ His enthusiasm for lard in the poem leads to a dream where Dolce witnessed himself, in an Ovidian fashion, metamorphosed into a succulent sausage, rich with fat dripping from the extremities of his body.⁷¹ Dolce gave the transference theory of Renaissance doctors a positive spin, since eating pork actually transformed him if not into the animal itself, into its gastronomical essence and pleasure. Accordingly, his poem exploited the common idea

of closeness and *fratellanza* between pigs and humans in an iconic and paradoxical way that privileged the sausage.⁷²

The third poem on sausages was written by Mattio Franzesi who dedicated it to a certain “*Caino spenditore*,” a friend presumably in charge of food provisioning in Florence.⁷³ Franzesi employs the language of gastronomy in an amusing pairing with quotidian language referring to sodomy. The sausage is called “*buon boccon*” (excellent morsel) and “*boccon sì ghiotto and divino*” when it is paired again with the beloved specialty *panunto*, declared superior to two famous upper-class foods, the *impepato* and marzipan.⁷⁴ Franzesi, like Dolce, describes the *panunto* or slices of bread with sausage inside as a divine and gluttonous morsel, definitely superior to luxury foods like the *beccafico*, a fat and fresh songbird.⁷⁵ Moreover, the *salsiccia* does not cost much and can be used in many different ways to sustain a meal: it can substitute for a salad (i.e., a woman)⁷⁶ and priests in particular use it often because they do not need to cook it but can just warm it up between their hands.

All the affirmations in Franzesi’s poem can be read in a double sense, as gastronomical discussion or as a metaphorical way of talking about the phallus-sausage and its pleasures. He refers with technical precision to the gastronomical side of sausages, even when metaphorically discussing sexual acts.⁷⁷ The sausage is better than *prosciutto* (both come from pork), when boiled (used with women), and is a good meal for sauces and “*guazzetti*” (sauces). Moreover, all the birds in the world would be like truffles without pepper and confetti without sugar, if not accompanied by sausages. A meal with sausages is a meal for taste and pleasure, not a meal for nourishment. Franzesi then describes its shape, and how to make a good-tasting, good-smelling sausage, using spices, herbs, and the unique ingredient for Florentine sausages, fennel. The poem ends with a list comparing the sausage in the *panunto* as equal to Florentine gastronomical specialties, such as the *ravigiuolo* cheese with grape, cheese with pears, old wine with stale bread, and others. Exalting a humble subject fitted well with the agenda of the bernesque poetry that lauded simple foodstuffs and everyday objects. But privileging sausages over songbirds was clearly not just a rhetorical ploy because it implied a comparison between a food for rustic people and a luxury food. Franzesi, like Grazzini before him, contributed in his poem to elevating the social status of the pork sausage. It was not simply a food “*da tinello*,” for poor courtiers used to eating the leftovers of their lord, but a meal worthy of rich people and important prelates.⁷⁸

In sum, poets, *novellieri*, and dramatists from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries took full advantage of the possibilities offered by the different meaning inherent in the word *carne*. It allowed them to discuss virility, sexual potency, masculinity, and sodomy under the guise of the gastronomical discourse. The sausage poems fit well with the constant preoccupation and advice of medical and dietary literature of the time on how to ensure sexual potency. The *novelle* discussed sexuality between men and women, endorsing a decisively masculine and traditional view that depicted women as lusty and desirous of raw *carne*,

which is able to heal every illness and satisfy every need. The poems on sausages confirm this hierarchical vision of sexuality dominated by the mighty phallus. Yet they also endorse a concept of diverse gastronomical taste, *lesso* and *arrosto*, *nel tondo* or *nel fesso*, to offer a variety of views of sexuality that responded to every *gusto*.

These poems on sausages were written in the cultural circle of the *Vignaiuoli* and *Virtuosi* academies, well known in the period for their substantial corpus of poetry dedicated to the comparison of fruit and vegetables to sexual organs and sexual acts. The not-so-covert sexual sense of most of those poems exalted sodomy, in their praise of peaches or carrots, or sexuality with women in poems on salads and figs. Poems on the mighty sausage covered all the bases of sexuality, although with a preference, often openly stated, for male-male sexuality. Intriguingly, the poetic and linguistic play on *carne* in the form of sausage allowed lengthy descriptions of an Italian and Florentine gastronomic specialty of the time, totally ignoring the negative vision of pigs as gluttonous, dirty animals presented by dietary literature. Since gluttony was the quintessential behavior represented by pigs, what better way to reclaim pork in the sausage wars than to use it to symbolize gastronomical richness and sexual variety? If sins of the flesh were often symbolized as sins of *carne* in medieval times, now in a perfect reversal the pleasures of the flesh were symbolized by the pleasures of eating meat in all of its variety, thanks in part to these sausage wars.

Thus, while a moral and disciplinary vision tried to control the discourse on food and eating in medical and dietetic treatises of the sixteenth century, a counter-argument advanced playfully in literature and bernesque poetry presented *carne* as a metaphor for the pleasures of the senses.⁷⁹ The conceptual pairing of gluttony and lust in medieval tradition began to lose ground to a much more complex world of food, taste, and pleasure, and the no longer quite so humble sausage led the way.

Notes

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1 Girolamo Parabosco, *La fantesca*, quoted in Giannetti, *Lelia's Kiss*, 143.

2 The popularity and frequency of the word *carne* to indicate the male sexual organ was matched in Renaissance literature and culture by the use of bird terminology to indicate the virile member as well as, less frequently, the female organ and sexual intercourse. Allen Grieco has recently catalogued and analyzed the numerous references to birds in imagery and literary sources and has studied birds and fowl as food to understand the connection between eating birds and fowl, and sexuality. He has uncovered the widely shared humoral perception of birds as a “hot” food which tended to over-stimulate

- the senses. In this way he was able to give a deeper explanation of the theological link between gluttony and lust typical of the period, pointing out the reason why, in common perception, the consumption of luxurious and heating food, especially birds, stimulated the sexual function. According to the taxonomy of the Great Chain of Being, birds belonged to air and they were hot and humid: when eaten they would transfer their properties to the body and stimulate carnal appetite. See Grieco, "From Roosters to Cocks."
- 3 Albala, *Eating Right*, 144–47.
 - 4 Quellier, *Gola*, 15–16.
 - 5 Cited in Grieco, "From Roosters to Cocks," 123. Much later, gluttony was defined as the consumption of luxury foods, particularly birds.
 - 6 On Dante's conceptualization of sins see Barolini, *Dante*, chapter 4.
 - 7 The Latin word "luxuria" meant extravagant/excessive desire (for power, food, sex, money, etc.) and in the Italian form "lussuria" became the word for lust in medieval Italy. In *Inferno* "lussuriosi" sinners are those who had excessive love of others, thus diminishing their love for God.
 - 8 Gluttony is a sin of incontinence like lust. In medieval bestiary and other iconographic sources especially north of the Alps gluttony is often represented as a fat man holding a piece of meat and a glass in his hands and riding a swine or a wolf. Quellier, *Gola*, 15–23. For medieval bestiaries see chapter one in Cohen, *Animals*. In Italy church frescoes represented gluttons in Hell suffering the tantic punishment.
 - 9 At the end of the sixteenth century, in the first edition of Cesare Ripa *Iconologia* (without images) Gluttony (*Gola*) is described as "donna a sedere sopra un porco perché i porchi sono golosi . . ." and Gourmandize (*Crapula*) is identified with a "donna brutta grassa . . ." *Iconologia*, 111 and 54.
 - 10 This helps to explain, for instance, why the famed preacher San Bernardino da Siena in his Lenten sermons in fifteenth-century Florence condemned the desire of Florentine young men for capons and partridges, claiming they opened the doors to a life of sensual foods and sensual pleasure. In particular, he linked gluttony to lust and sodomy. Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, ed. Ciro Cannarozzi (Pistoia: Tip. A. Pacinotti, 1934), II: 45–46, quoted in Vitullo, "Taste and Temptation," 106.
 - 11 Montanari, "Peasants," 179.
 - 12 Montanari and Capatti, *La cucina italiana*, 76–77. Pheasants and partridges represented the ideal components of a refined and tasty banquet, possible only for people with means.
 - 13 Braudel, *Capitalism*, 129.
 - 14 "Danno ottimo nutrimento, risvegliano l'appetito, massime a' convalescenti e sono cordiali. Nuocono a gli infermi, e massime à quei che hanno la febre e fanno venir tisichi i villani." Residing on a high position on the Great Chain of Being, they represented powerful people and, accordingly, were sternly cautioned against for rustic people, to whom, according to Pisanelli, they could be dangerous. Pisanelli, "De beccafichi, Cap. xxvi" in *Trattato de' cibi*, 33. Similarly, pheasants and partridges are responsible for provoking asthma in rustic people (Cap. xxvii and xxix).
 - 15 In his work, Bartolommeo Sacchi, known as Platina, paid much attention to the idealistic principle of moderation derived from the Greek and Roman world, along with his interest in the revival of Epicureanism. Platina, *On Right Pleasure*.
 - 16 Eamon, *Science*, 163.
 - 17 Giovan Battista Zapata, *Li maravigliosi secreti di medecina, et chirurgia, nuovamente ritrovati per guarire ogni sorta d'infirmità, raccolti dalla prattica dell'eccellente medico e chirurgico Giovan Battista Zapata da Giuseppe Scientia chirurgico suo discepolo* (Venice: Pietro Deuchino, 1586; 1st ed. Rome, 1577), 37–41, quoted in Scully, "Unholy Feast," 85.
 - 18 Eamon, *Science*, 188. Bovio, *Flagello*. He gives the example of a doctor whose wife was sick and how he cured her with a diet of French soup, capon, and wine but could not apply the same treatment to his other patients in fear of losing business; see 45–46.
 - 19 "più facilmente di carne si faccia carne che di qualunque altra sorte di cibo." Romoli, *La singolare dottrina*; "Delle carni in generale," 205r. Domenico Romoli (n.d.) previously

- worked as a cook with the name of *Panunto* (oiled bread) and then became steward for Pope Julius III.
- 20 For poor people and peasants in particular, pork continued to be the meat of choice; and although it had a negative reputation, in the case of people occupied in heavy physical work, pork was reputed nourishing and healthful.
 - 21 Florentine communal statutes of 1322 prohibited innkeepers from serving up culinary delights because they could attract men and boys and incite them to commit the unspeakable sin of sodomy. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 159. During Cosimo the Elder's regime Florentine Archbishop St. Antonino—in his confessor's manual—warned against sloth, excess food, and drink as causes of sodomy. Toscan, *Le Carnaval*, vol. I: 190. See Giannetti Ruggiero, "The Forbidden Fruit," especially pages 31–33.
 - 22 Later in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Church allowed consumption of eggs, butter, and cheese during famines and epidemics. See Gentilcore, *Food and Health*.
 - 23 One of the most important representatives of this tendency was the Venetian noble Alvise Cornaro who wrote the extremely successful *Trattato della vita sobria* in 1558. In general, moralists' writers of the later Middle Ages and early Renaissance continued to advise against eating food that would produce excessive heating of the body.
 - 24 The dietetic literature, particularly the influential earlier author Michele Savonarola and the later Baldassar Pisanelli, supported the restriction of birds and fowl to particular categories of people held to be more capable of controlling the passions they induced, such as the powerful and rich or those needier of stimulation such as the sick and the ailing. Grieco, "From Roosters to Cocks," 115.
 - 25 See *novella* "De Novo Ludo" (Sercambi, *Novelliere*) available online at www.classicitaliani.it/sercambi_novelle_08.htm where Ancroia enjoys her time with the priest: "la donna, come vide Tomeo fuori uscito, preso un fiasco del buon vino, una tovagliuola, alquanti pani e della carne cotta per Tomeo, et al prete Frastaglia se n'andò e con lui si diè tutto il giorno piacere, pascendosi di carne cruda e carne cotta per Il boche . . ."
 - 26 Apostolo Zeno in the eighteenth century attributed the author name Gentile Sermini to the two anonymous caudexes containing the *novelle*. Monica Marchi in her critical edition of the *novelle* prefers to use Pseudo-Sermini instead of the conventional name Gentile Sermini. See Marchi, "Introduzione," in Pseudo-Gentile Sermini, *Novelle*, 10–22. The *novelle* were written in the first half of the fifteenth century.
 - 27 "[. . .] non altramente fece la valente madonna Alisandra che, agustandole molto la carne e 'l sapore, per quello dilettevole giardino, preso insieme d'accordo giornata . . ." Pseudo-Gentile Sermini, *Novelle*, xi, 270.
 - 28 Fortini, *Le giornate*, I, xvi, 296–300.
 - 29 Grazzini (Il Lasca), *Le Cene*, I: vi, 80–94.
 - 30 Giannotti "Il vecchio amoroso," II: i, 40–41. On remedies for impotence, and early modern drama, see Giannetti, "The Satyr."
 - 31 "A Tiziano," in Aretino, *Lettere*, 67–68.
 - 32 This section is partially based on Giannetti Ruggiero, "The Forbidden Fruit," 31–52.
 - 33 See "Ragionamento Antonia e Nanna," in Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 38.
 - 34 "The Roman Porcellio Enjoys the Trick Played on the Friar in Confession," in Bandello, *Novelle*, vi: 125. See the discussion of the tale in Giannetti, *Lelia's Kiss*, 181–82.
 - 35 *Ibid.*, 181.
 - 36 On the battles between Quaresima and Carnival see Ciappelli, *Carnevale*.
 - 37 Albala, *Eating Right*, 168 and 181. The painting is now in the Museo Civico of Udine.
 - 38 Sercambi, "De vidua libidinosa" in "Appendice," *Novelle inedite*, 417–18.
 - 39 Matthews-Grieco, "Satyr and Sausages."
 - 40 Several *novelle*, from Boccaccio to Sacchetti, related the closeness in everyday life of pigs and humans in rural and urban areas and the importance of pork for sustenance, but also the negative perception of pigs and filthy and gross animals. For instance, see Sacchetti LXX, CII, CXLVI, CCXIV. For Boccaccio see "Calandrino e il porco."
 - 41 Already in the Middle Ages, from the perspective of the Great Chain of Being, pork and the quadrupeds occupied a questionable position—they were not part of Air like birds

- nor of the Earth but somewhere in between; and pig in particular occupied one of the lowest position among all quadrupeds. Grieco, "Alimentazione e classi sociali," 378–79. Pigs were voracious animals and, according to the Galenic doctor, eating their fattening meat would transform a person in a pig, as a later image of *Gola* as a woman sitting on a pork would make really explicit.
- 42 For instance, in the second half of the sixteenth century, Baldassar Pisanelli advised eating sausages and salami in moderation, but recognized in them some positive characteristics such as reawakening of appetite and helping to make drinking more pleasurable. Pisanelli, *Trattato de' cibi*, c. 13.
- 43 Platina, *On Right Pleasure*, Book VI, 281.
- 44 Ibid., 277.
- 45 Ficino, *Three Books on Life*, Book 2, 181.
- 46 See <http://lauramalinverni.wordpress.com/201702/04/i-salumi-alla-corte-estense-cristoforo-messisbugo/>
- 47 See the section "Sausages and Salami" in Matthews-Grieco, "Satyr and Sausages."
- 48 Pietro Aretino in his comedy *Il Filosofo* summarizes well this new ambivalence about pork when he had one of his characters resolutely affirm: "refined sugary confections (the *biancomangiari*) and quails do not stimulate taste as do steaks and sausages." Pietro Aretino, *Il Filosofo*, III, 15.
- 49 See the text in Romai, Plaisance, and Pignatti, eds., *Ludi esegetici*, 313–15. Firenzuola is also author of the famous dialogue *On the Beauty of Women*.
- 50 vv. 12–14.
- 51 "Canzon, vanne in Fiorenza a quei poeti," v. 76
- 52 The *Virtuosi* academy was the continuation of the *Vignaiuoli* academy, one of the first "academies" of sixteenth-century Italy, an informal gathering of intellectuals that met for dinner, witty conversations, music, and poetry in the early 1530s. Around 1535 or slightly later, the *Vignaiuoli* renamed themselves *Accademia della Virtù* and/or *Reame della Virtù* and continued their activities until ca. 1540. Meetings, often held at Carnival time, featured improvised speeches and the recitation of poems, frequently accompanied by music. The *Vignaiuoli* was one of the first academies in Italy to privilege the usage of vernacular and became most famous for the poetic production of so-called "learned erotica," as well as for their anti-Petrarchan and anti-classicist poetic stance.
- 53 Grappa, now identified with Francesco Beccuti, comments on Firenzuola's poem. See Grappa, *Il Comento*. On Beccuti see Fiorini Galassi "Cicalamenti."
- 54 The allusion here is to the poem *Sopra il forno* by Giovanni della Casa, *De' Fichi* by Francesco Maria Molza, and *In lode delle castagne* by Andrea Lori. All three are poems dedicated to the female genitals.
- 55 "Mangiasi la salsiccia innanzi et drieto / a pranso, a cena, o vuo' a lessso o vuo' arrosto / arrosto et dietro è più da grandi assai; / innanzi et lessa, a dirti un bel segreto / non l'usar mai fin che non passa Agosto." vv. 30–35.
- 56 "Perchè in estate gli uomini sono meno capaci di fare l'amore, le donne invece lo sono di più [. . .]? Perché gli uomini sono più inclini a fare l'amore d'inverno, le donne in estate? Forse perché gli uomini sono di natura più caldi e secchi [. . .]?" Aristotele, *Problemi*, ed. Maria Fernanda Ferrini (Milan: Bompiani, 2000), IV, 25–28, quoted in Pignatti, ed., *Ludi Esegetici II*, 200.
- 57 "O vecchi benedetti! / questo è quel cibo che vi fa tornare giovani e lieti, et spesso ancho al zinnare" vv. 58–60.
- 58 "Fassi buona salsiccia d'ogni carne: / dicono l'istorie che d'un bel torello/dedalo salsicciaio già fece farla / e a mona Pasife diè a mangiarne? Molti oggidì la fan con l'asinello . . ." vv. 46–50.
- 59 vv. 61–65.
- 60 "Basta che i salsiccioli/cotti nei bigonciuoli, / donne, dove voi fate i sanguinacci, / son cagion che degli uomini si facci." vv. 72–75.
- 61 On the cultural function of humor see Matthews-Grieco, "Satyr and Sausages," 37.

- 62 For the text of the *canzone*, see Grazzini, “In lode della salsiccia,” in Romei, Plaisance, and Pignatti, eds., *Ludi esegetici*, 227–30. For Grazzini “Comento di maestro Nicchodemo dalla Pietra al Migliaio sopra il Capitolo della salsiccia del Lasca,” see *ibid.*, 231–309. There is no secure date regarding the writing of the *Comento* but it should have been written around 1539–40. See Franco Pignatti, “Introduzione,” in Romei, Plaisance, and Pignatti, eds., *Ludi esegetici*, 163.
- 63 *Ibid.*, vv. 22–33.
- 64 *Ibid.*, vv. 76–81.
- 65 *Ibid.*, vv. 94–111.
- 66 “La bellezza del tagliere non è come forse molti credono, e non consiste in l’esser bianco, non di buon legno, non tondo, non ben fatto, ma si bene nell’essere pieno di buona carne ben cotta e ben trinciata; . . . tolghinsi pur costoro i capelli di fin oro, la fronte più del ciel serena, le stellanti ciglia . . . come dire le Laure, le Beatrici, le Cintie e le Flore!” Grazzini, *Comento di Maestro*, 240–41.
- 67 Sonetto n. 5 of *Canzoniere* on the name of Laura: “Quando io movo i sospiri a chiamar voi”
- 68 “Perciò che quei traditori de’ medici la prima cosa levono il porco e non vogliono a patto nessuno che n’habbia l’ammalato per mantenergli bene il male addosso, sendo il porco e maggiormente la salsiccia, habile e possente a guarir d’ogni malattia e più sana che la sena, più necessaria che la cassia, più cordiale che il zucchero rosato, più ristorativa che il manicristo, et insomma ha più virtù che la bettonica.” Grazzini, *Comento di Maestro*, 280–81. The *terzina* commented is 103–05: “Io crederria d’ogni gran mal guarire/ quando haver ne potessi un rochio intero,/ ancor ch’io fussi bello e per morire.”
- 69 In Dolce, *Capitoli*.
- 70 “dono invero magnifico e reale,/da far morir di gola l’astinenza/e leccarsi le dita a Carnevale.” *Ibid.*, vv. 10–12.
- 71 “E chi m’avesse allora allora punto/aria veduto uscir liquor divino/del corpo, ch’era pien di grasso e d’unto.” *Ibid.*, vv. 43–45.
- 72 Some authors trying to dignify pork, recycled Galen’s idea expressed in *De alimentorum facultatibus* where he argued troublingly that pork was pleasurable because it was similar to human’s flesh. For instance “Le carni del Porco fra tutte le altre carni dei quadrupedi han vittorie in nutrire e dar più forza ai corpi perché così nel gusto come nello odore par che habbiano una peculiar unione e fratellanza col corpo umano si come da alcuni si è inteso che per non sapere hanno gustato la carne dell’huomo” [For taste as well as for odor, it seems that the meat of pork has a peculiar unity and likeness with the human body, as some reported, who tasted human flesh while not knowing it] in *Un breve e notabile trattato del reggimento della sanità, ridotto dalla sostanza della medicina di Roberto Groppetio* 362–63 v. The little volume is attached to *La singular dottrina*. It is not clear whether it was written by Panunto himself or not. For a similar affirmation see also: *Della natura et virtù de’ cibi*, 68v. Not all agreed with this troubling similarity but it was quite a common affirmation in many medical treatises and in some literary works of the time.
- 73 In Romei, Plaisance, and Pignatti, eds., *Ludi esegetici*, 316–18.
- 74 “Qui non è osso da buttare al cane, / e’l suo santo panunto è altra cosa/che lo impepato overo il mrzapane,” vv. 25–27.
- 75 “Dicen che la midolla del panunto,/incartocciata come un cialdoncino, / tal che di sopra e di sotto appaia l’unto, / è un boccon sì ghiotto e sì divino, / che se lo provi ti parrà migliore/ch’un beccafico fresco e grassellino,” vv. 38–42. It should be noted that even the luxury food, the *beccafico*, had strong sexual overtones.
- 76 The cultural discourses that surrounded salad in early modern Italy and Europe were complex and rich, ranging from sexuality and manners, to taste, gastronomy, and class identity. See Giannetti, “Renaissance Food-Fashioning.” Online at: <http://escholarship.org/uc/item/1n97s00d>.
- 77 “è un boccon sì ghiotto e sì divino, / che se lo provi ti parrà migliore/ch’un beccafico fresco e grassellino,” vv. 40–43. Franzesi, “Capitolo sopra la salsiccia,” 316–18.

- 78 “Questo non è già pasto da tinello/ma da ricchi signori e gran prelati / che volentieri si pascon del budello.” Ibid., vv. 79–81.
- 79 On the disciplining vision of the sixteenth century and a counter-discourse in dramatic literature see Giannetti, “Of Eels and Pears.”

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PART III

Visualizing sexuality in word and image



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10

GIANANTONIO BAZZI, CALLED "IL SODOMA"

Homosexuality in art, life, and history

James M. Saslow

From his mid-thirties, the Lombard-Sienese painter Gianantonio Bazzi (1477–1549) was publicly known as “Il Sodoma.” This epithet translates as “Sodom,” the biblical city eponymous with sexual transgressions that were then both a sin and a crime. Sodomy bracketed multiple acts, but most commonly referred to love between men; so, his nickname might be freely rendered as “Mr. Sodomite.”

Our principal biographical source is Giorgio Vasari, whose *Vita* of Bazzi (1568) recounts several revealing or scandalous episodes. A few are exaggerated or false, skewed by Vasari’s disdain for both homosexuality and Siena. However, his plausible explanation of how the artist earned his sobriquet is not refuted by other evidence. Vasari describes him as

a gay and licentious man, keeping others entertained and amused with his manner of living, which was far from creditable. . . . [S]ince he always had about him boys and beardless youths, whom he loved more than was decent, he acquired the by-name of Sodoma.¹

While sources for private feelings are scanty and often problematic for this period, and Sodoma left little first-person testimony, this and other records suggest a *prima facie* case for the artist’s erotic interest in other males. He is unique in Renaissance Italy as the only artist whose homosexuality was frankly avowed and widely known. His character and sexual interests offer a provocative case study of the intersections between eros and creativity, and how that sensibility was manifested in his imagery. His experiences further suggest that there were overlapping audiences eager to receive and respond to that sensibility.

Sodoma exhibited other character traits also considered eccentric or insolent, and was fond of capricious pranks; the monks at Monteoliveto Maggiore, his first large commission, referred to him as “Il Mattaccio,” the “crazy fool.”² He

was an impudent mocker of moral decorum: Vasari reports indignantly about the nickname Sodoma that “in this name, far from taking umbrage or offence, he used to glory, writing about it songs and verses in *terza rima*, and singing them to the lute with no little facility.” He was also infamous for his flamboyant clothing and for keeping an entire menagerie in his home, including pet birds, monkeys, squirrels, and race horses; Vasari called the house “Noah’s Ark.”³ He entered his horses in public contests, and we can date his sobriquet back to a series of races in Florence from 1513 to 1515. When his steed won, the heralds asked what owner’s name to announce; Bazzi replied, “Sodoma, Sodoma,” indicating that he was already known by that name and willing to be associated with it. The incident also reveals the precarious social landscape that known or suspected sodomites had to negotiate. Thumbing his nose at a mocking public backfired: a group of outraged elders incited a mob attack, during which he narrowly escaped being stoned to death.⁴

Anecdotes and documents notwithstanding, historians have long tried, for widely differing reasons, to chip away at the foundations of a historiographical tradition dating back to Vasari himself. For it was Vasari, unwittingly anticipating modern queer scholarship, who first understood Sodoma as having homosexual desires and assumed some connection between his sexuality and his work.⁵ To the prudish chronicler, that connection was negative: Vasari blamed Sodoma’s failure to achieve greatness on his excesses of character, from laziness to carnality, scolding that if he had worked harder, “he would not have been reduced to madness and miserable want in old age at the end of his life, which was always eccentric and beastly.”⁶ Value judgment aside, the assumption that artists’ personalities and passions are intimately imbricated with their work runs throughout Vasari’s biographies. Modern generations, beginning with the homophile Victorian critic-historians John Addington Symonds and Walter Pater, acknowledged the same connection with a positive valence, reading Sodoma’s androgynous figures and distinctive iconography as revealing glimpses into the sensibilities of a man aware of both his own desires and the gap separating that passion from social norms. The path they laid down guided post-Stonewall gay studies through the early 1980s.⁷

More recently, postmodern theoreticians, stressing the ever-shifting social constructions of sexuality and identity, have countered such attempts to posit any individual sexual identity or group homosexual consciousness, however embryonic and sporadic, in that era. Their methodology, inspired by scholars from Michel Foucault to Eve Sedgwick and David Halperin, dismisses such formulations as anachronistic over-reading.⁸ The generational shift in goals and methods, from “gay and lesbian studies” to “queer studies,” instigated an ongoing debate. These theoretical polarities have implications for the present study, which aims to excavate the embodied passions and creative process of an individual who felt homosexual desire, and to reconstruct, to whatever extent possible, an early moment in the gradual, fitful emergence of self-aware homosexual sensibilities and self-expression.

Although I defer consideration of this theoretical controversy until the essay's end, my working hypothesis parallels the nuanced historiography of Christopher Reed, who reminds us that, although readings of Renaissance homosexuality as similar to modern conceptions were

convincingly challenged by Foucault's insistence that [the modern] sexual typology was not invented until the nineteenth century, [nevertheless] no idea is without roots, and subsequent scholarship provided evidence that convinced even Foucault to recognize stages in the eighteenth, the seventeenth, and even the sixteenth century leading to the invention of homosexuality as a personality type.⁹

As a personality, Sodoma was among the few early modern artists who visualized homoerotic desire. This essay investigates that process along three intertwined axes: life, work, and historiography. His biography provides a unique microhistory of an early avowed homosexual and his culture's understanding of that inclination. His works gave visual expression to his erotic sensibility, and contemporary patrons and spectators, from pederastic monks to libertine aristocrats, were ready to receive it sympathetically. Finally, I conclude with a more personal historiographical meditation on the controversy over whether embryonic homosexual consciousness can be located in early modern culture.

Early religious works

Arriving in Siena as a young man, Sodoma established relations with the Chigi family and the Benedictine order, who commissioned numerous works, mainly on sacred themes.¹⁰ Officially, since Christianity condemned all non-procreative sex, theological narratives offered next to no scope for "homo-representation"; but his religious pictures nonetheless provide material for queer readings. If a subject contained any potential for imagining or accentuating a homoerotic subtext, Sodoma exploited it more than any artist of his time except Michelangelo (also a lover of men), seldom missing an opportunity to foreground male beauty or intimacy in nude or suggestively clad bodies. Many images celebrate the boyish, androgynous type that was the most common object of adult male desire at the time, while a few idealize the more heroic male adult body; he often derived both figure types from classical sculptures with a homoerotic pedigree. And many members of the audience for his imagery, both clerical and lay, were likely to appreciate this eroticized beauty.

The first example of the interlinked sensibilities of artist and spectators is his fresco cycle for the abbey at Monteoliveto Maggiore, outside Siena (1505–08), depicting the life of the order's founder, St. Benedict.¹¹ Payment records confirm several Vasarian details about the artist, from his early nickname, Mattaccio, to his use of apprentices (*garzoni*) and his fondness for extravagant finery. Although the austere life of the founder of monasticism was unpromising terrain,

Sodoma found novel pretexts for inserting numerous visual features—often rare or unique inventions—that would appeal to the homosexual or bisexual gaze.

Most striking in its novel and ironic departure from the subject's nominal moral is the illustration of Benedict seeking relief from a female devil's sexual temptation by stripping off his clothes and flinging himself into spiny briar bushes¹² (Figure 10.1). Unlike the few earlier representations of this scene, Sodoma renders the vegetation soft and unthreatening; rather than conveying mortification of the flesh, he presents in full frontal view a nude of heroic proportions, reclining comfortably in a pose modeled on classical prototypes. The *all'antica* beauty of the body displaces attention from the saint's physical self-abnegation onto his potential to arouse erotic desire—precisely what Benedict is trying to suppress.¹³

The most personally revealing of the frescoes is the Miracle of the Colander (Figure 10.2), in which the saint and his homespun miracle (repairing a household sieve) are shunted to the left, leaving the central focus on the figure of Sodoma himself, showing off his legendary wardrobe. His self-portrait corroborates Vasari's disdainful take on him as a fop, "caring for nothing so earnestly as for dressing in pompous fashion, wearing doublets of brocade, cloaks all adorned



FIGURE 10.1 Sodoma, Abbey of Monteoliveto Maggiore, *Saint Benedict Is Tempted by a Female Devil*, fresco, 1505–8.

Photo credit: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali/Art Resource, NY.



FIGURE 10.2 Sodoma, Monteoliveto, *Miracle of the Colander*, fresco, 1505–8.

Photo credit: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali/Art Resource, NY.

with cloth of gold, the richest caps, necklaces, and other suchlike fripperies only fit for clowns and charlatans.” Here, as elsewhere, Vasari seems well informed about specific details of Sodoma’s life and work: his comment is supported by the abbey account books, which describe a garment much like the one Sodoma wears here, an embroidered gold cape listed among elaborate items of apparel as a form of payment from the monks, who had received it from a wealthy nobleman.¹⁴ The artist also surrounds himself with exotic animals, just as Vasari noted he liked to do: birds and two pet badgers.

Sodoma’s sartorial tendencies and other biographical details connect him to a contemporaneous homosexual demimonde in ways that Vasari himself was perhaps unaware of, but which is well attested in social history of the period. His clothing, fondness for androgynous youths, and writing of satirical poetry are all behaviors then associated with sodomites as an identifiable group with its own recognizable customs. Research by Michael Rocke, Guido Ruggiero, and others into the prevalence of sodomy and the emergence of urban homosexual networks in early modern Italy has revealed that they were so widespread they can scarcely be called a “subculture.” As Rocke puts it, Bazzi’s brand of sexuality became “an increasingly common feature of the public scene and the collective mentality.”¹⁵ In Florence, a special sodomy court heard hundreds of cases

annually until 1502; a substantial percentage of males passed through at some time in their lives.¹⁶ Hence “sodomy was . . . a common part of male experience that had widespread social ramifications.” Rocke notes that “this sexual practice was probably familiar at all levels of the social hierarchy” and among a wide range of professions.¹⁷

Among those occupations are the “beardless boys” whom Vasari blames for the artist’s nickname, probably his apprentices and workshop assistants. Artists’ studios being all-male, “the potential for homoerotic relations in such an environment was high,”¹⁸ and intimate, sometimes sexual relations between assistants or models and their masters are suggested by documents on artists from Donatello to Leonardo da Vinci and Botticelli. Closer to Sodoma’s time, the bisexual sculptor Benvenuto Cellini was taken to court by the mother of one apprentice for coercing him sexually.¹⁹ This common social pattern gives Sodoma’s behavior wider implications, since his actions were shared with countless other men.

His wardrobe is the clearest exemplar of those erotic implications. Helmut Puff has documented the role of material culture in formulating and enacting sexual subcultures, and how extravagant clothing was a marker of effeminacy and sexual deviance. Exchange of rare and costly textiles or clothing could betoken homosexual relationships, either as gifts for love or payment for services.²⁰ By the mid-fifteenth century, San Bernardino da Siena’s sermons thundered against boys’ receiving clothing and money for sex.²¹

Within the field of costume studies, which asserts “the centrality of clothes as the material establishers of identity itself,” clothing is understood as a set of materialized symbols with social functions and meanings. As Jones and Stallybrass have explored, clothes can either embody and reinforce submission to normative social roles (uniforms) or, when deployed in violation of sumptuary standards, mark the wearer as consciously rejecting those norms—as Sodoma did by appropriating the dress of an aristocrat.²² Thus, portraying himself in extravagant, coded finery was a subversive act of self-identification with a marginalized minority: in Andrew Ladis’s phrase, “a pose of arrant foppishness, as if the painter personified the very diabolical temptations of the flesh that he painted and lived, not excluding what was commonly known as ‘the monastic vice’”²³—a revealing euphemism for sodomy.

The artist gives freest play to erotic signifiers in the scene of St. Benedict welcoming two disciples, Saints Maurus and Placidus, amid the wealthy youths’ retinue and onlookers²⁴ (Figure 10.3). While the disciples are modestly clothed and posed, both the epicene youth on the center axis and the African groom at right are shown *da tergo*, Italian for a rear view that spotlights the buttocks. The central youth and his mirror image at far left are boyish androgynes, embodying the predominant pattern of pederasty, in which mature men sought still-feminine adolescents for anal intercourse. Thus, some viewers, at least, would have appreciated the erotic implications of the motif.²⁵



FIGURE 10.3 Sodoma, Monteoliveto, *St. Benedict welcomes Sts. Maurus and Placidus*, fresco, 1505–8.

Photo credit: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali/Art Resource, NY.

Reinforcing this erotic interpretation, the two youthful onlookers at center and left also sport versions of Sodoma's own elaborate clothing, as does the groom to the right of center. They flaunt the styles associated with homosexual seduction: tight multicolored stockings, long hair, and extravagant fringes, hats, and colors.²⁶ Such clothing had long been associated with sodomites; Alain

of Lille's *De planctu naturae* (ca. 1160) lamented that these men "over-feminise themselves with womanish adornments."²⁷ San Bernardino da Siena inveighed against parents who let their sons wear short doublets and "stockings with a little piece in front and one in back, so that they show a lot of flesh for the sodomites," resulting in such an appealing adolescent always "having the sodomite on his tail."²⁸

These suggestive details may have been projections of Sodoma's erotic mindset, but it is highly likely that they resonated with some of the monks who were his primary audience. Shifting our focus from the artist, we should also examine the mental world of his viewers. Reception theory or spectator theory asks not what did the artist put into the work, but, rather, what did the audience take out of it? What interests, beliefs, or habits of seeing did his audience have, and how did that subject-position influence their reading of his messages? As Adrian Randolph observed regarding the reception of Donatello's homoerotic bronze *David*, an artwork can function as "a receptacle for the beholder's imaginative concerns." His and other studies have explored how reception of religious art was determined by the viewers' gender, particularly in convents, where nuns often specified subjects relevant to their experience; these insights can be extended to male religious and to sexuality as well as gender.²⁹

Sodoma's audience here was exclusively male clergy, proverbially stereotyped as sodomitical.³⁰ Temptations were exacerbated by the enforced closeness of clerical living arrangements: several scenes depicting Benedict and his monks highlight their day-to-day intimacies both emotional and physical.³¹ To head off such dangers, the rules of the order specified that

no brother is permitted to enter the cell of another without permission of the abbot or a prior; if this is permitted, they may not remain together in the cell with the door closed. And no monk may touch another in any way . . .

A light was to burn all night in the dormitory area and latrine, presumably to prevent secret trysts under cover of darkness.³²

Such precautions were not entirely effective, as a few visual examples attest. A near-contemporary satirical painted plate depicts a monk pointing to a youth's bare bottom; the caption explains, "I am a monk, I act like a rabbit" (Figure 10.4)—then, as now, a symbol of tireless sexuality, particularly homosexuality.³³ A Flemish print depicts a 1559 event in Bruges in which three monks were burned at the stake for "sodomitical godlessness."³⁴ These starkly contrasting examples dramatize the contradictory culture within the religious world: male-male sex was acknowledged, though officially taboo and sometimes severely punished, yet often tolerated and even laughed about. Outside monastery walls, free from Church proscriptions, Sodoma found more overt opportunities to celebrate such love.



FIGURE 10.4 Majolica plate, attributed to Master C.I., ca. 1510–20. Musée national de la Renaissance, Écouen, France.

Photo credit: ©RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.

Secular subjects

Sodoma illustrated secular subjects for private patrons and domestic settings. His most career-boosting painting depicted the Roman heroine Lucretia, whose suicide to preserve family honor after she was raped symbolized the ideal of married women’s honorable chastity; gifted to Pope Leo X, it earned the artist a papal knighthood.³⁵ When the opportunity arose, however, as with sacred images, he

paid unusual attention to the homoerotic elements of myth and history, which offered explicit exemplars of male devotion and passion. And the audience for his best-known classical project, a fresco cycle for the papal banker Agostino Chigi, was the sophisticated, libertine Roman society who were as likely to share his sexual interests and habits of spectatorship as were the monks at Monteoliveto.³⁶

In 1516–17, Chigi commissioned Sodoma to decorate the bedroom of his villa, now called the Farnesina. The wealthy financier's love nest, shared with his mistress Francesca Ordeaschi, offers a revealing microcosm of the hedonistic, tolerant atmosphere of High Renaissance Rome, where even popes had mistresses and bastards, and humanist classical culture provided justification for libertine bisexuality *all'antica*.³⁷ Numerous rooms were painted with erotic myths both heterosexual and homosexual.³⁸

Given Chigi's personality and interests, Sodoma was a sympathetic addition to his creative team. Although Sodoma married in 1510, his nickname was public knowledge by 1513, when he registered as "Sodoma" in a list of racehorse owners, and two years later had the heralds call that name. After describing our artist's clothes, manners, and mocking spirit, including the racing incident, Vasari reports that "in [these] things Agostino, who liked the man's humour, found the greatest amusement in the world." The appreciative patron requested episodes from the life of Alexander the Great, historically implied as bisexual.³⁹

The principal scene recreates a lost Greek painting of Alexander's marriage to Roxana, known through an ancient ekphrasis—a classicizing tribute to Chigi and his beloved⁴⁰ (Figure 10.5). The emperor proffers a marriage crown to the princess, while putti cavort in playful eroticism. To the right stand two idealized men: nude Hymen, god of marriage, and torch-bearing Hephaestion, Alexander's intimate companion and, in some accounts, lover. Both figures are based on a well-known Greek statue, the Apollo Belvedere, depicting the most vigorously bisexual of the gods.⁴¹ While principally a heterosexual scene, then, the picture's sub-theme is nude male beauty and the passion Hephaestion represents.

Sodoma's audience was predisposed to appreciate this story's erotic duality. Many patrons and viewers had bisexual or homosexual desires; an anecdote in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (ca. 1514) reports that "Rome has as many sodomites as the meadows have lambs." The erotic tone among these clerics, aristocrats, artists, and writers was light-hearted; while sodomy was outlawed, enforcement was spotty and penalties light.⁴² Eyewitness testimony for "queer visibility" at the Farnesina comes from raunchy bisexual author Pietro Aretino, who spent time there while Sodoma was painting. Aretino recorded an ancient statue of a satyr chasing a boy, an explicit complement to the loftier male love in Sodoma's fresco. He wrote to Sodoma twenty-five years later, expressing nostalgia for their shared youth, and wishing that "we were embracing each other now with that warm feeling of love with which we used to embrace when we were enjoying Agostino Chigi's home so much."⁴³ One glimpses the atmosphere of an affectionately demonstrative, pansexual pleasure-palace. Like the life it looked out upon, Sodoma's picture is a mélange of sexualities, with intimacy between men given "equal time."

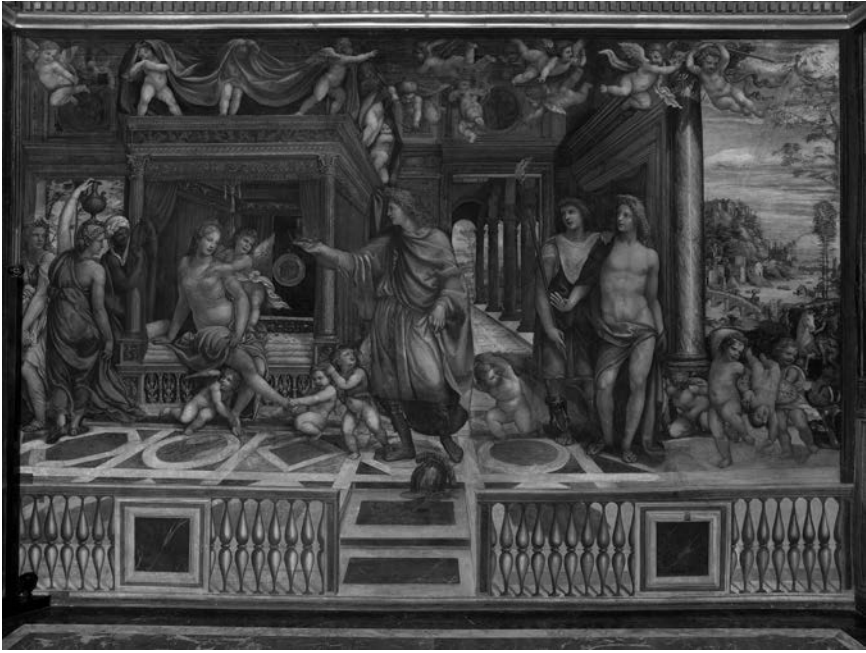


FIGURE 10.5 Sodoma, *The Marriage of Alexander and Roxana*, Villa Farnesina, Rome, fresco, 1517–19.

Photo credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

Further evidence for the casual attitude toward homosexuality—Sodoma’s in particular—is a set of epigrammatic couplets published in 1517 by Eurialo d’Ascoli, a poet in the circles around Chigi, Aretino, and Leo X, bluntly informing his readers that “Sodoma is a pederast.” The poem celebrates Sodoma’s painting of Lucretia, which earned his knighthood; only the final verses turn comic. Having praised the artist for verisimilitude that brings Lucretia back from the dead, Eurialo imagines her interpreting this miracle as an opportunity to convert the artist sexually. The narrator then asks her his own facetious question, implying that as a sodomite the artist would not normally be inspired by female subjects:

Now beautiful Venus grants me the nourishment of light breezes [i.e.,
earthly life],
So that I can reclaim you, Sodoma, from tender youths.
Sodoma is a pederast; why then, Lucretia, did he make you
So lifelike? He has our buttocks instead of Ganymede.

*Nunc mihi pulchra Venus tenui dat vescier aura,
Ut revocem a teneris, Sodoma, te pueris.
Sodoma paedico est; cur te Lucretia vivam
Fecit? Habet nostras pro Ganymede nates.*⁴⁴

Sodoma's knighthood was cited by whitewashing early scholars as proof that the artist could not have been homosexual, since such sins would have disqualified him from religious honors.⁴⁵ But here we see again how casually this milieu treated sexual transgressions. The fabulously wealthy Chigi married Ordeaschi in 1519, and Leo X—himself a reputed sodomite who, Vasari records, “took pleasure in eccentric and light-hearted figures of fun such as [Sodoma] was”—legitimized their four children.⁴⁶ Worldly success was hardly evidence against impropriety.

Eurialo's couplets recall Vasari's statement about Sodoma's nickname that “he used to glory [in it], writing about it songs and verses in *terza rima*, and singing them to the lute.” As with clothing, Sodoma was participating in another cultural tradition that linked artists, writers, and readers of non-normative sexuality in a web of self-expression. Bawdy burlesque poetry treated all sexuality with lighthearted comedy; Sodoma's texts have not survived, but we can garner some sense of their contents and tone from verses by contemporaries. What Deborah Parker labels “a poetry of transgression,” full of sexual innuendo and whimsical exaggeration, circulated in manuscript, public readings, and print.⁴⁷ The father of burlesque poetry, Francesco Berni, was banished from Rome in 1523 for too openly mourning a young male lover.⁴⁸ The genre became popular among visual artists eager to establish their intellectual credentials through writing, including such homosexuals or bisexuals as Michelangelo, Bronzino, and Cellini.⁴⁹

Sodoma's personality chimed perfectly with the genre's subversive insolence. Bronzino's *capitolo* “In Praise of the Galleys,” for example, unashamedly eroticizes the all-male world of oarsmen on ships, muscular and sweaty males confined in close quarters where sex among themselves was the only outlet: here “boiled and roasted meats are hardly ever mixed,” a common metaphor for vaginal (wet) versus anal (dry) sex. Berni, expanding on the trope that priests are sodomites, declares that their example is infecting monks, using a fruity symbol for boys' buttocks:

Peaches were for a long time food for prelates,
But since everyone likes a good meal,
Even friars, who fast and pray,
Crave for peaches today.

*Le pesche eran già cibo da prelati,
Ma, perché ad ognun piace i buon bocconi,
Voglion oggi le pesche insin ai frati,
Che fanno l'astinenzie e l'orazioni.*⁵⁰

The sardonic, guilt-free humor of such texts suggests, as Domenico Zanrè describes, “a marginal undercurrent operating within an official cultural environment,” and demonstrates that “certain individuals were able to produce alternative literary responses within a dominant . . . milieu that attempted to contain and, in

some cases, exclude them."⁵¹ An incident around 1530 corroborates Sodoma's own refusal to accept derogatory comments from authority: when a Spanish soldier insulted him, the artist got revenge by drawing his portrait and identifying him to his superiors.⁵² San Bernardino was furious precisely because so many sodomites seemed unrepentant and unafraid of divine judgment. What enraged him and Vasari was not these men's behavior alone, but the quality Italians call *faccia tosta*—"cheek" or "a big mouth"—refusal to give even lip service to official mores.⁵³ The burlesque mode evinces the first buds of an oppositional response to social disapproval: a self-aware articulation of outsider status, and an emerging rebellion against social convention that opened a space, however narrow, for asserting alternative consciousness and self-affirming values.⁵⁴

Greco-Roman texts and images served Sodoma, like other homosexual artists and patrons from Michelangelo to Caravaggio, as validation for their *all'antica* desires and pretexts for visualizing male beauty and eros.⁵⁵ Within educated elites, a tolerant, classically inspired hedonism held its own against legal and clerical taboos until late in Sodoma's lifetime, when the Council of Trent began its anticlassical reform (1545). In this libertine culture, an artist widely known for sexual nonconformity was able to smilingly adopt a derogatory nickname as a public identity and even flaunt his sexual interests in word and image, with little harm to his string of major commissions and honors.

Later religious works

Sodoma's late commissions were predominantly religious. As at Monteoliveto, these images emphasize the erotic appeal of figures who are nominally not sexual: saints, angels, and soldiers. Whereas at the monastery it was possible to analyze the reactions of a specific clerical audience, commissions for more public locations could be viewed by the whole cross-section of society, some proportion of which, as outlined earlier, would have understood and welcomed homoerotic allusion. As Patricia Simons has explained, "Renaissance imagery might appear to condemn non-normative sex . . . , but it was possible for viewers to take works in other, imaginative directions."⁵⁶

Sodoma's best-known work, depicting Saint Sebastian (1525), epitomizes his typical traits: androgynous classicizing male beauty, emotional pathos and sensuous chiaroscuro (Figure 10.6).⁵⁷ Iconographically, it offers a prime example of his sensitive antennae for elements of religious narrative with specialized appeal. Sebastian was a Roman soldier who refused to renounce Christianity, for which Emperor Diocletian, despite their intimate personal relationship, ordered him shot by archers. Saint Ambrose's hagiography establishes their strong emotional bond, open to erotic interpretation: he notes that Sebastian was "greatly loved" by Diocletian and his co-emperor Maximian (*intantum carus erat Imperitoribus*).⁵⁸

Sodoma paints a virtually nude, Apollo-like Sebastian with blood trickling from several wounds. He looks longingly at the angel bringing a martyr's crown—his reward for loving sacrifice to God—with an expression that could



FIGURE 10.6 Sodoma, *Saint Sebastian*, processional banner, Pitti Palace, Florence, 1525.

Photo credit: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali/Art Resource, NY.

equally connote divine or earthly ecstasy. While his bond with the emperor offered a secular hint at Sebastian's sexual inclinations, the implied passion between Sebastian and the godhead is a more important, and universal, emotional dynamic, with a profound yet ambivalent homoerotic subtext. For all Christians, intense, loving union with Christ was the ultimate spiritual goal; for men, however, exhortation to the symbolically feminine ideal of passive, ecstatic submission to another male raised the specter of sodomy. The phallic arrows piercing Sebastian evoke sexual penetration, a symbol of the saint's necessary, but problematic, feminization;⁵⁹ they also recall Cupid's love-inducing shafts, multiplying the signals for an erotic response.

Cinquecento image-makers were expected to encourage such a passionate response because, as Simons observes in relation to Christ, for Sebastian too "the visualization of supreme beauty was necessary in order to induce reverence."⁶⁰ Theoretically, religious images could function on these two levels simultaneously, without contradiction: the lure of physical beauty would hopefully lead the viewer to a higher spiritual adoration. In practice, however, it was difficult to police the borders between earthly and heavenly passion. We know that Sebastian's beauty was experienced as problematically titillating by at least one sex: the Florentine artist-monk Fra Bartolommeo painted a nude image of the saint so appealing that female parishioners admitted in confession that it stimulated carnal thoughts, after which it was taken down.⁶¹ It was just such temptations that the Council of Trent acknowledged when it set out to purge church imagery of eroticism. So, it is not difficult to imagine that men, as well as women, were attracted to Sodoma's provocative Sebastian in the physical sense.⁶²

The "seeming contradictions of deliberately evoking erotic desire in religious painting" have been parsed by Jill Burke, who sees in this practice "a deep and knowing ambivalence toward sexuality" that signals "a huge variance between official rhetoric and widely accepted practice."⁶³ By including formal and iconographic cues to a homoerotic response, Sodoma could appeal to men who, like himself, experienced love and desire in male terms. Like extravagant dress and burlesque poetry, pictorial ambiguity opened another narrow cultural space for expressing alternative sexuality.

Historiography: a modest proposal

This essay has aimed to demonstrate three propositions: that Sodoma was known for, and acknowledged, desire for men; that his work evinces a distinctive mode of seeing and representing that expresses that erotic inclination; and that contemporaneous audiences would have appreciated that sensibility. As Ruggiero asserts,

It is no longer possible to ignore the general shared culture of the erotic and its omnipresence in daily exchange, nor is it possible to overlook the particular subcultures that coexisted at the time and that were such a central part of daily life.⁶⁴

Without claiming anachronistically that this evidence establishes anything so coherent and exclusive as a modern “gay identity,” I submit that these emerging networks and customs, alongside visual and literary production on homosexual themes, constitute early shoots of an alternative sexual consciousness that would reach critical mass only during the Enlightenment. I accept the historiographic formulation of the Renaissance as “early modern,” which stresses continuities from that culture into the modern era, presupposing a model of cultural change that is gradual and evolutionary rather than abrupt and discontinuous. To quote Reed again, “If modern ideas of sexual identity and artistic self-expression cannot be simply mapped onto the Renaissance . . . it is nevertheless true that these notions have Renaissance roots.”⁶⁵

However, to seek the “roots” of anything “modern” in anything “past” has become problematic since the advent of postmodern theory. There are now, as Reed observes, “wildly varying interpretations of Renaissance art’s relationship to homosexuality”⁶⁶—more broadly, of relationships among desire, behavior, identity, and self-expression. To social constructionists, the search for glimmers of an alternative, proto-modern awareness in Sodoma’s *ambiente* is misguided. There can be no transhistorical connections between sexual actors in different periods, because sexual identity is not innate or fixed; rather, it is created through social discourses that define and control sexuality, an unstable product of external forces acting on the passive individual. There were no homosexual persons, only homosexual acts. Puff’s formulation: “Sodomy was not thought of as a lifelong orientation, let alone a social identity,” is echoed by Reed’s: “[S]exual behavior in Renaissance Italy was not seen as a basis for individual identity.”⁶⁷

This school coined the term “essentialist” to disparage earlier researchers who, from Symonds to John Boswell, saw sufficient commonality with those in earlier times who desired other men to justify searching the Middle Ages and Renaissance for branches of a sexual family tree dating back before 1867 (when “homosexual” was coined). Without accepting all the methodological baggage identified with an often over-simplified “essentialism,” one can still maintain that someone calling himself “Mr. Sodomite” seems a prime excavation site for evidence of such genealogical links, since his name rendered his erotic proclivity a “lifelong social identity.” Like a genetic mutation that may crop up in random individuals, and only gradually spread across a species’ gene pool, Sodoma constituted an irruption of anomalous possibilities that, while not yet fully articulated, began to diffuse new forms of sexual identity and self-expression that increased over the next several centuries.

These methodological disagreements center on two questions: one external and sociological, the cultural categorization of homosexual behavior; the other internal and psychological, the conscious experience of individuals who desired other men and their degree of agency within a hostile official discourse. There was clearly a dominant conceptual structure of canon and civil law that confined homosexuality to taboo acts that might potentially tempt anyone, within which

our modern notion of inherent sexual "orientations" was not officially recognized. Just as clearly, however, no culture is monolithic, and a complex of alternatives operated alongside these formal structures. As we have seen, the elements of this quasi-underworld were in place by the sixteenth century: meeting places, distinctive behaviors, and cultural expressions.⁶⁸ As Ruggiero has outlined, such "illicit worlds had their own coherent discourse,"⁶⁹ which viewed male-male sexuality as an amusing peccadillo; suggested that some individuals were drawn to it by distinctive character traits; and expressed awareness of (and resistance to) the gap between official values and their own experience.

The solution to this impasse lies in moving beyond an "either-or" cultural analysis to a "both-and" approach. Instead of setting arbitrarily precise boundaries to ever-shifting conceptions of sexuality, it would more accurately reflect Sodoma's transitional environment to acknowledge the temporal overlapping of contrasting systems of thought and behavior, and to explore the realities of those who negotiated the dialectic between them. Two tendencies in current scholarship, however, militate against such open-ended rapprochement. The first is reluctance to accept evidence for alternative sexual consciousness; the second is ascribing to cultural discourses an unrealistic power over against embodied experience. What follows is part summary, part personal statement: a roadmap out of an increasingly pointless stalemate, and a brief for greater attention to the lived experience of men-who-had-sex-with-men and its genealogical links to later generations.

Two principal examples of the discord over what "counts" as evidence of sexual desire and identity are the tendency to downplay or deny evidence for Sodoma's sexuality, and the disregard of alternative language imputing distinct personality to sodomites. First, the present examination of how Sodoma expressed his homoerotic desires depends on establishing that his nickname was in fact a marker of his sexuality, which raises the question: how reliable is Vasari? Unfortunately, as Paul Barolsky notes, "How we read Vasari depends on our sensibility and taste. We all ride our own hobbyhorses."⁷⁰ Since the Victorians, homophobic scholars have attempted to discredit Vasari and defend a respected Old Master against any implication of immorality in "his evil-sounding sobriquet."⁷¹ Efforts to give it a non-sexual meaning are highly speculative: Enzo Carli supposes the nickname was simply Bazzi's own little joke, "with which . . . he loved to glorify himself facetiously," but it strains credibility that a heterosexual man would consider a false claim of deviancy "glorifying."⁷² When such dismissals are echoed by queer-studies scholars, the hobby-horse is epistemological caution rather than morality, but the effect is the same: to erase facets of queer history that conflict with a higher belief—that homosexuality did not (yet) exist.⁷³

We do have to read Vasari cautiously: despite the author's claims, Sodoma's wife never left him, nor did he die poor.⁷⁴ Because few details in Vasari's psychological profile are confirmed by other sources, postmodern skepticism insists that any statement not independently documented is probably false. But Vasari

is generally most informed about artists close to his own time, many of his *artistic* facts are documentable, and details in the *Vite* of Sodoma and Beccafumi indicate that he visited Siena, saw artworks, and interviewed informed sources. Moreover, his characterization of Sodoma as capricious, insolent, and sodomitical is corroborated by three period sources: Eurialo d'Ascoli's couplets, Paolo Giovio's life of Raphael ("a perverse and unstable mind bordering on madness"), and Armenini's account of Sodoma's revenge for an insult.⁷⁵ Thus, this essay has followed a less restrictive approach, accepting any statement that is not contradicted by external sources as possible and perhaps likely. All historical reconstructions involve judgments of probabilities; giving one's sources "the benefit of the doubt" can make up for any loss of positivistic certainty with gains in breadth, depth, and detail.

Secondly, there is linguistic evidence that particular psychological traits were becoming attached to habitual sodomites; but this suggestive vocabulary is often brushed aside to "save the phenomenon" of an episteme of acts, not personalities. I agree with Simons that "both categorical approaches are problematic." A more subtle, inclusive view is adumbrated by Robert Mills, who demonstrates that the juridical focus on potentially universal acts

was in tension with moral, Church perspectives which also sought to make an identity of the sodomite . . . by characterizing sodomy as a more enduring kind of practice, a vice for which one had a particular disposition, tendency or taste. . . . [S]uch perspectives developed unevenly, over long periods of time, [but there are] signs that some medieval thinkers . . . wished to pin the sin down to particular bodies and selves.⁷⁶

Examples of how "Sodoma" might thus denote an individual with an inborn sexual preference include one of Matteo Bandello's humorous tales (*novelle*), ca. 1540, in which the dying Porcellio, pressed by his confessor to admit that he performed acts "against nature," claims to misunderstand the question because, he says, "to divert myself with boys is more natural to me than eating and drinking."⁷⁷ Similarly, Giordano Bruno's *Spaccio della bestia trionfante* (1584) praises Socrates for resisting "la sua natural inclinazione al sporco amor di gargioni" (his natural inclination toward the filthy love of boys).⁷⁸ Dall'Orto has surveyed numerous Renaissance Italian terms for those who commit homosexual acts, notably *inclinazione*, which implies "leaning" in a particular direction.⁷⁹ Similar spadework for the French cognate *inclination* has been performed by Domna Stanton, while numerous other French and English tropes, such as "masculine love," have been catalogued by Joseph Cady.⁸⁰ Language was clearly emerging at this point articulating distinctive traits among those drawn to sodomy: not yet an "identity" in the modern sense, but a critical shift toward notions of internal difference.

If postmodernism underplays evidence of sexual self-awareness, it conversely overestimates the power of discourse, unduly minimizing individual agency

and the imperatives of the embodied self. The ability of collective discourse to enforce social norms is never absolute. It engages in perpetual dialectic with the potentially anarchic desires of society's diverse individual members, a situation in which "lived eroticism did not always conform to the rules of social hierarchy,"⁸¹ from Romeo and Juliet to Sodoma and his apprentices.

This ineluctable tension arises because discourse is inculcated into the mind, whereas sexual desire is grounded in parts of the biological organism less susceptible to rational suasion. Embodied experience is transhistorical: lust, like hunger, pre-exists cultural conditioning, and "the recalcitrant realities of human conduct"⁸² are insistent enough when unsatisfied to overcome any social convention. This essay has marshalled evidence that Sodoma, and his contemporaries with similar inclinations, felt a dissonance between their desires and the dictates of society, and they possessed sufficient agency to imagine alternative values—what Walter Pater viewed as a signal Renaissance development, a "liberty of the heart" that enabled nonconformists to move "beyond the prescribed limits of that system."⁸³ Individual bodies are not mere passive receptacles for an overpowering discourse "poured into" them, but are capable of awareness of that effort at marginalization, and of active resistance.

The ultimate question lying behind such methodological differences is: why do we do queer history? Here again, divergent answers ride different hobby-horses: postmodernists focus on epistemology, while those open to historical continuity are more interested in phenomenology. The former philosophize, "How and what can we *know* about Renaissance sexuality?" answering that we can comprehend little about a shifting discourse in which "sexuality" did not exist; the latter psychoanalyze, "How did it *feel* for sexual outsiders to negotiate this social regime?" and seek clues in intimations of difference in life, language, and art. While the former stress chronological discontinuity, the latter seek a "usable past," a narrative that produces affinities and resonances across time. The latter project is inherently political: as George Chauncey characterizes emerging queer studies in the late nineteenth century,

claiming certain historical figures was important to gay men not only because it validated their own homosexuality, but because it linked them to others. . . . This was a central purpose of the project of gay historical reclamation. . . . By constructing historical traditions of their own, gay men defined themselves as a distinct community.⁸⁴

Put another way, this school, and this essay, seek to recover evidence of homosexual desire and expression—however fragmentary, ambiguous, and carefully historicized—to counter centuries of suppression, and it seems ironic when social constructionism abets the same historical erasure.

A final image, recently attributed to Sodoma, provides an enigmatic but tantalizing coda to this discussion⁸⁵ (Figure 10.7). His hair garlanded with leaves, beard and brows untamed, "Allegorical Man" leers like a satyr while his right



FIGURE 10.7 Sodoma (attributed), *Allegorical Man*, ca. 1547–8, oil, Accademia Carrara, Bergamo.

Photo credit: Scala/Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali/Art Resource, NY.

hand makes the contemptuous gesture of “the fig,” an insult that, since Martial’s Epigrams (2:28), can imply that the receiver is a sodomite. The picture’s precise iconography remains unexplored; Radini Tedeschi suggests the gesture alludes to Sodoma’s nickname, and the picture may thus be a final self-portrait, literally or symbolically. If so, it contrasts poignantly with the artist’s first self-portrait

forty years earlier (Figure 10.2). Once young and beardless, his foppishness a silent assertion of nonconformity, he has aged to a still elaborately costumed but more overtly defiant graybeard, telling the world in gesture what his burlesque poems expressed in words: I am what I am, I've survived your derision, and I still don't care what you think.

Admittedly, this interpretation remains speculative, but it would effectively bookend the scenario of Sodoma's life and work presented here. Our ability to entertain such a hypothesis depends, however, on more than attribution and iconography. The potential to recover the self-expression of creative Renaissance sodomites also requires a polyvalent openness to a range of both personal and cultural evidence and interpretive methods.

Hearteningly, many seminal postmodern theorists are more accepting of multiplicity than their acolytes. Foucault praised Boswell's conception of "gay," while Carla Freccero deploys Foucault's own theoretics against his discontinuity between early modern and modern sexuality. She approvingly cites David Halperin's suggestion that we supplement rigidly compartmentalized ideas of identity with concepts of "partial identity, emerging identity, transient identity, semi-identity . . .," the better to "indicate the multiplicity of possible historical connections between sex and identity."⁸⁶ Murray reassures us that "the alternative to intellectual conformity is not a lack of coherence but rather a series of interwoven, complementary . . . approaches."⁸⁷ Perhaps the most balanced and inspiring methodological flag has been raised by Valerie Traub, who recalls that, while seeking traces of early modern same-sex eros, she assumed "neither that we will find in the past a mirror image of ourselves nor that the past is so utterly alien that we will find nothing usable in its fragmentary traces."⁸⁸ I have sought in Sodoma not a mirror-image, but a family resemblance. He is "usable" as our ancestor: someone with whom we share an identifiable lineage of desire and self-expression, in whose uniquely chronicled creative life we can recapture the origins of an increasingly prominent familial trait.

Notes

This essay grew from a paper delivered at a 2007 conference at University of Toronto organized by Konrad Eisenbichler. Thanks to Patricia Simons for her constructive suggestions.

- 1 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 380; Vasari, *Lives*, 7: 246. Vasari repeats these accusations in his Vita of Domenico Beccafumi, ed. Milanesi, 5: 634–35.
- 2 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 382; Vasari, *Lives*, 7: 247.
- 3 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 381; Vasari, *Lives*, 7: 246.
- 4 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 389–90; Vasari, *Lives*, 7: 251, records the old men's protest; for documents for the 1513 and 1515 races, see 6: 389 n. 3, 390 n. 1; Bartolini and Zombardo, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 44–45, nos. 15–19.
- 5 A note on terminology: I use "homosexual" throughout in the narrow descriptive sense, to refer to sexual desire or behavior between persons of the same sex. Although modern audiences read "homosexual" with broader connotations of psychology and identity, here it is only shorthand for "male–male sex." In modern typology, Sodoma would be considered bisexual, since he was also married and a father.

- 6 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 379; Vasari, *Lives*, 7: 245. The artist did not die destitute or insane: see below, n. 74.
- 7 Fisher, "A Hundred Years," 13–39, outlines the activist project of research into Renaissance homosexuality since the nineteenth century.
- 8 For an overview of this position, see Grantham Turner, "Introduction," 8, n. 3.
- 9 Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 54–55.
- 10 Bartalini, "Sodoma."
- 11 The standard English monograph remains Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*; for Monteliveto see 93, cat. no. 4. See further on the abbey Radini Tedeschi, *Sodoma*, 138–47; Batistini, *Il Sodoma*; documents in Bartalini and Zombardo, *Fonti*, 15–31, no. 7.
- 12 Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 93, no. 4.8; Batistini, *Il Sodoma*, no. 8. The incident is recorded by Gregory the Great, *Life of St. Benedict*, chap. 2.
- 13 Only a few illustrations of this subject are known: both a fresco by Spinello Aretino (San Miniato, Florence) ca. 1387 and a panel by Ambrogio di Stefano Bergognone, ca. 1490, show a pale, unidealized body among prominent briars. A sexual reading of the series is supported by Kiely, *Blessed and Beautiful*, chap. 7, "Sodoma's St. Benedict: Out in the Cloister."
- 14 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 383; Vasari, *Lives*, 7: 248, for the quote and cloak. The gift, along with other payments of fabrics and clothing, is transcribed by Bartalini and Zombardo, *Fonti*, 18–19, 266. See also Radini Tedeschi, *Sodoma*, 78–80.
- 15 Roche, "The Ambivalence," 57.
- 16 Roche, *Forbidden Friendships*, 3–6; his book provides extensive data and analysis of fifteenth-century Florence. On sodomy elsewhere, see Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*; Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, chap. 9; Mormando, *The Preacher's Demons*. For a Europe-wide perspective, see Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, chaps. 10–12; Puff, "Early Modern Europe," 79–102.
- 17 Roche, *Forbidden Friendships*, 112, 134.
- 18 Simons, "The Sex of Artists," 81.
- 19 Roche, *Forbidden Friendships*, 163; Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 262–69.
- 20 Puff, "The Sodomite's Clothes," 251–72.
- 21 Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, ed. Pietro Bargellini (Milan: Rizzoli, 1936), 796–97, 898, cited and discussed in Dall'Orto, "La fenice," 5, and n. 27 and n. 28. See also Roche, "Sodomites."
- 22 Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, 2–7.
- 23 Ladis, *Victims*, 109.
- 24 Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 94, no. 12.
- 25 On anal sex as social practice and artistic motif, see Saslow, *Ganymede*, chaps. 2–3; Rubin, "'Che è di questo culazzino!'" ; Grantham Turner, *Eros Visible*, 274–99. Sodoma's *Deposition*, ca. 1510, similarly spotlights the rear view of a soldier: Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 117, no. 7. Other artists emphasized rear views, often motivated by the formal-intellectual challenge of the *paragone*: Summers, "'Figure come fratelli.'" When we have evidence of an artist's sexual proclivities, as with Sodoma, it is reasonable to explore whether he imbued the motif with personal erotic interest; lacking such evidence, however, we cannot know which other artists might have done the same. Regardless of artistic intent, similar stimuli would invite similar audience responses.
- 26 Similar figures appear in scenes no. 1, 30, and 36 as catalogued by Batistini (Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 93–4, nos. 1, 20, 26).
- 27 Alain of Lille, *The Complaint of Nature*, trans. James Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute, 1980), 187, cited in Puff, "The Sodomite's Clothes," 260.
- 28 Bernardino, as quoted by Roche, "Sodomites," 12, 15; cited in Simons, *The Sex of Men*, 99.
- 29 Randolph, *Engaging Symbols*, 151, chap. 4. For nuns, see Hayum, "A Renaissance Audience"; for both sexes, Hiller, *Gendered Perceptions*.
- 30 On the prevalence of clerical sodomy see Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance*; Mills, *Seeing Sodomy*, chap. 4; Roche, *Forbidden Friendships*, 136–37. See also Parker, *Bronzino*, 37: "burlesque poets tended to present clerics as sodomites."

- 31 Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 93–94, nos. 4.13, 4.14, 4.21; Batistini, *Il Sodoma*, nos. 13, 14, 31 (illns. 59, 60, 68).
- 32 The regulations are in the monastery's fourteenth- and fifteenth-century chronicle: *Regardez le rocher*, 182–83, 418–19 (my translation).
- 33 Illustrated and discussed in Saslow, *Pictures and Passions*, 103–04.
- 34 Frans Hogenberg, *Execution for Sodomitical Godlessness in Bruges*, 1578; illustrated in Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 327.
- 35 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 387; Vasari, *Lives*, 7: 250.
- 36 On the city's licentious paganism, see Bartalini, *Le occasioni*, 39–86.
- 37 Rowland, "Render unto Caesar."
- 38 Other homoerotic images are in the Sala di Psiche, where Ganymede appears twice, and one spandrel depicts Jupiter kissing Cupid; Saslow, *Ganymede in the Renaissance*, 135–40; Turner, *Eros Visible*, 109–33.
- 39 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 384–88; Vasari, *Lives*, 7: 248–50. Alexander and Hephaestion's love is alluded to by Aelian, *Various History*, 12: 7, and other ancient authors.
- 40 Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 164–77, no. 20; Bartalini, *Le occasioni*, 78–81; Radini Tedeschi, *Sodoma*, 193–94, no. 56.
- 41 On Sodoma's use of classical sources and gender ambiguity see Smith, "Queer Fragments."
- 42 Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, book 2, chap. 61. On the sexual tone in Rome, see Crompton, *Homosexuality and Civilization*, 269–90; Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*. Leo X's Rome also associated sartorial effeminacy with homosexuality: pasquinades mocked Cardinal Ercole Rangone and sodomite friends for "going around disguised as nymphs": Burke, "Sex and Spirituality," 491.
- 43 Aretino, *Lettere sull'arte*, vol. 1, no. 68 (1537), vol. 2, no. 244 (1545); Aretino, *The Letters*, 123–25, no. 58. Other sources record a sculpted Antinous, Hadrian's lover: Bartalini, *Le occasioni*, 73–75.
- 44 d'Ascoli, *Epigrammatum*, 11v–12r; Bartalini and Zombardo, *Fonti*, 64–67, no. 29; Radini Tedeschi, *Sodoma*, 71–72.
- 45 Ibid., 23.
- 46 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 386–88; Vasari, *Lives*, 7: 250. On Leo's sodomitical reputation see Giovio's biography, in *Le vite di dicenove*, 141v–142v.
- 47 Parker, *Bronzino*, chap. 1; Parker, "Towards;" Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, 3–5; Tonozzi, "Queering Francesco"; Zanrè, *Cultural Non-conformity*, chap. 3.
- 48 Tonozzi, "Queering Francesco," 589–91.
- 49 On these artist-authors see Parker, *Bronzino*; *The Poetry of Michelangelo*; Gallucci, *Benvenuto Cellini*.
- 50 Fisher, "Peaches and Figs," 158–59.
- 51 Zanrè, *Cultural Non-conformity*, 1–2.
- 52 Armenini, *De' veri precetti*, 42–43; Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 393; Bartalini, *Le occasioni*, 17.
- 53 Dall'Orto, "La fenice di Sodoma," 71–72, quoting Bernardino, in *Le prediche volgari*, ed. C. Cannarozzi (Pistoia: Pacinotti, 1934), 277. A document dated 1531, purportedly Sodoma's tax declaration, is even more insolent, signed with a sexual vulgarity; Bartalini and Zombardo, *Fonti*, 131–33, 281–92. While now considered a seventeenth-century forgery, it demonstrates that a "legend" about Sodoma's sexual brazenness persisted after his death.
- 54 See Milner, "Introduction."
- 55 Sodoma depicted another homoerotic myth distinctively: his Fall of Phaeton is almost unique in including Phaeton's cousin Cynus, with whom literary sources imply a loving relationship (Hayum, 135, no. 12). Suggestively, the only other artist to include Cynus was Michelangelo.
- 56 Simons, "European Art," 135.
- 57 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 390; Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 191, no. 24; Radini Tedeschi, *Sodoma*, 211–12, no. 73.
- 58 *Acta sanctorum*, 2: 629, 20 Januarii; Jacopo da Voragine's thirteenth-century *Golden Legend* repeats this phrase (s.v. "St. Sebastian").

- 59 On arrow symbolism, including homoerotic potential, see Cox-Rearick, "A 'Saint Sebastian,'" 160–61.
- 60 Simons, "Homosociality," 38.
- 61 Vasari, *Vita* of Fra Bartolommeo. For additional complaints about sexualized Sebastians, see Bohde, "Ein Heiliger," 86, n. 18.
- 62 Sodoma's later depictions of Sebastian evoke the same erotic subtext. In his *Madonna and Child with Saints*, ca. 1541–44 (Hayum, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 257, no. 43), Sebastian stares at Jesus, who toys with the saint's arrow—a phallic detail seen in no other image. Similarly unique is Sodoma's *Resurrection*, 1535 (Hayum, 235, no. 33) in depicting the angels as nude putti.
- 63 Burke, "Sex and Spirituality," 488–92.
- 64 Ruggiero, "Introduction," 2.
- 65 Reed, *Art and Homosexuality*, 43.
- 66 *Ibid.*, 47.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 43; Puff, "Early Modern Europe," 84–85.
- 68 On this alternative culture in various cities see Puff, "Early Modern Europe," 87; Ruggiero, "Marriage," 23–26; Dall'Orto, "La fenice di Sodoma," 61–64, 79.
- 69 Ruggiero, "Marriage, Love," 11.
- 70 Paul Barolsky, "Vasari's Literary Artifice," 121.
- 71 Cust, *Giovanni Antonio Bazzi*, 10.
- 72 Carli, *Il Sodoma*, 9–12; Carli, "Bazzi."
- 73 See, e.g., Patricia Simons, "Sodoma, II," 286.
- 74 Vasari, *Le vite*, 6: 379, 398, citing contradicting documents, 399 n. 1.
- 75 On Eurialo see above, n. 44; Armenini, n. 52. On Giovio's biographies see n. 46; for his comment on Sodoma ("praepostero instabilique iudicio usque ad insaniae affectationem") see Bartalini and Zambrano, *Fonti*, 83–86, no. 35.
- 76 Simons, "Homosociality and Erotics," 48, n. 4; Mills, "Acts, Orientations," 205.
- 77 Bandello, *Tutte le opera*, ed. Flora, 1: 95, novella 6; Bandello, *Tutte le opera*, trans. Payne, 1: 94–8.
- 78 Bruno and Campanella, *Opere*, 321.
- 79 Dall'Orto, "La fenice di Sodoma," 74–76; Dall'Orto, "'Socratic Love,'" esp. 34–35, 46–50.
- 80 Stanton, "The Threat." See further Stanton, ed., *Discourses of Sexuality*; the historiographic overview by Smith, "Premodern Sexualities"; Cady, "The 'Masculine Love.'"
 - 81 Puff, "Early Modern Europe," 87.
 - 82 Brundage, "Playing," 23.
 - 83 Pater, *The Renaissance*, 3–6, 18–19; Fisher, "A Hundred Years," 19–23.
 - 84 Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 285–86.
 - 85 Radini Tedeschi, *Sodoma*, 257, no. 118.
 - 86 O'Higgins, "Sexual Choice," 10; Halperin is quoted and discussed in Freccero, *Queer*, 48.
 - 87 Murray, "Introduction," xiv.
 - 88 Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2002), 32.

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VAGINA DIALOGUES

Piccolomini's *Raffaella* and Aretino's *Ragionamenti*

Ian Frederick Moulton

In 1539, Alessandro Piccolomini, a thirty-one-year-old Sieneese nobleman living in Padua, published a short dialogue: *La Raffaella, ovvero Dialogo della bella creanza delle donne* [*Raffaella, or a Dialogue on women's good manners*].¹ Piccolomini's dialogue, in which an older woman encourages a younger one to commit adultery, owes much to the example of Pietro Aretino's scandalous *Ragionamenti* (1534, 1536),² in which an experienced courtesan teaches her daughter how to become a prostitute. While the filial relationship between *La Raffaella* and the *Ragionamenti* has long been noted, the cultural and ideological significance of this relationship remains largely unexamined.

Both texts imagine private female conversations: what do women talk about when no men can hear? The answer in both cases is men. Men and sex. (What else would men think that women talk about?) Both texts are male fantasies of female pedagogy and sexual knowledge, in which male authors adopt a voice of experienced femininity to articulate imagined feminine perspectives on sex, gender relations, and gender identity. In the *Ragionamenti*, the women's conversations are scandalous, but also, at times, radical and transgressive, questioning fundamental norms of gendered behavior and exploring the role of power in gender relations.³ Despite Aretino's ambivalent misogyny, the *Ragionamenti* imagine possibilities of female agency and power. Piccolomini's *Raffaella*, on the other hand, merely encourages women to subvert one form of male authority in order to submit to another; it imagines freeing wives from their husbands the better to subordinate them to their male lovers. Piccolomini playfully suggests that this shift is doing women a favor because it acknowledges their need for sexual pleasure.⁴ His text takes the subversive energy of the *Ragionamenti* and turns it into a safe, sly joke. Women, it turns out, do not want autonomy: they want to submit to younger, sexier men. In *La Raffaella*, female agency is not a threat to male dominance—it simply rewards ardent male lovers over dreary husbands.

The conversations of Aretino's *Ragionamenti* take place over six days. An experienced courtesan named Nanna is discussing with a younger prostitute named Antonia what way of life would be best for her teenaged daughter Pippa—should she grow up to be a nun, a wife, or a whore? Nanna spends the first three days of the dialogue recounting her own experiences in each of these roles; at the end of the third day she and Antonia decide that Pippa should be a prostitute. They reason that while nuns break their vows and wives are unfaithful to their husbands, prostitutes (for all their faults) are not hypocritical—they are simply doing the necessary work they are paid to do.⁵ This ends the first volume. In the sequel, having decided Pippa's future, Nanna and Antonia teach her the things she will need to know. On the fourth day, they instruct her how to be a successful courtesan; on the fifth, they discuss men's cruelty to women; and on the sixth they listen while a midwife teaches a wetnurse how to make a living procuring women for sex with men. In all the discussions about prostitution, Nanna's instruction focuses not on how to satisfy men but on how to manipulate them. The condition of a prostitute is inherently hazardous, and Nanna and Antonia teach Pippa how to survive and thrive in a world of gender warfare, where men are always seeking to exploit women, sexually, physically, socially, and financially.

Throughout the *Ragionamenti* the text takes an ambivalent attitude to its speakers. On the one hand, Nanna and Antonia are monstrous women who embody a wide range of misogynist stereotypes. They are deceitful, amoral, gluttonous, greedy, garrulous, and fickle. On the other hand, they are cunning tricksters, who use their superior intellect to dupe those who try to exploit and manipulate them. Nanna is at once a shocking figure of feminine excess and an insightful satirist who bears more than a passing resemblance to Aretino's own persona as an epicurean scourge of powerful hypocrites.⁶

The *Ragionamenti* contain shockingly explicit descriptions of a wide range of sexual activity, but almost all of these are in the early chapters of the text, in which nuns betray their vows in endless orgies and wives betray their elderly husbands to find satisfying sex elsewhere.⁷ The chapters on prostitution focus not on sexual pleasure or technique, but rather on how best to earn money and swindle clients. Aretino's whores are not particularly interested in sexual pleasure—they want money, power, and status instead. And the best way to attain all three is by selling the promise of sexual availability while deferring sexual activity for as long as possible; the ideal relationship is one where a man is paying large amounts of money without ever actually managing to have sexual relations with the woman he is buying. As Nanna puts it, "lust is the least of all the desires [whores] have, because they are constantly thinking of ways and means to cut out men's hearts and feelings." ("La lussuria è la minor voglia che elle abbino, perché le son sempre in quel pensiero di far trarre altrui il core e la corata.")⁸ Through a series of cunning tricks, deals, and lies, Nanna ends up living in luxury in a fashionable house protected by gangs of armed men whom she employs to remove unwanted suitors.⁹ She survives and thrives by manipulating male desire and profiting from male gullibility.

Nanna's worldly success is, of course, a fantasy that bears little relation to the actual living and working conditions of most early modern prostitutes,¹⁰ but the *Ragionamenti* admit this as well. Nanna knows she is not normative, and that her position remains precarious: "I must confess that for one Nanna who knows how to have her land bathed by the fructifying sun, there are thousands of whores who end their days in the poorhouse." ("Ti confesso che, per una Nanna che si sappia porre dei campi al sole, ce ne sono mille che si muoiono nello spedale.")¹¹ On the sixth day, the Midwife agrees: "A whore's life is comparable to a game of chance: for each person who benefits by it, there are a thousand who draw blanks." ("E so che il puttanare non è traffico da ognuno; e perciò il viver suo è come un giuoco de la ventura, che per una che ne venga benefiziata, ce ne son mille de le bianche.")¹² Consequently, Nanna makes sure to spend a lot of time warning her daughter Pippa about the many ways that men can harm the women in their power.

In contrast to Aretino's earthy dialogue of whores, Piccolomini's *La Raffaella* consists of an imagined discussion between two upper-class women: Raffaella, an elderly, impoverished, but well-born woman, and Margarita, a newly married wealthy young noblewoman. The tone of conversation in *La Raffaella* is certainly more polite and decorous than Nanna and Antonia's profane and bawdy language in the *Ragionamenti*.¹³ Raffaella, a friend of Margarita's late mother, presents herself as a pious widow, eager to help Margarita adjust to the challenges of being an adult woman and the mistress of a household. Throughout her talk of pass-times, cosmetics, deportment, and fashion, Raffaella advises Margarita to take full advantage of youthful pleasures; if a woman does not enjoy herself while she is young and beautiful, she is sure to become bitter in her old age:

As for God, as I said earlier, it would be better, if it were possible, to never take any pleasure in the world, and to always fast and keep strict discipline. But, to escape even greater scandal, we must consent to the small errors that come with taking some pleasures in youth, which can be taken away later with holy water. . . . And moreover, in all this I'm telling you, presuppose that this little necessary sin will bring you much honor in the world, and that these pleasures that must be taken can be managed with such dexterity and intelligence that they will bring no shame from anyone.

Quanto a Dio, già t'ho detto che sarebbe meglio, se si potesse fare, il non darsi mai un piacere al mondo, anzi starsi sempre in digiuni e disciplina. Ma, per fuggir maggior scandalo, bisogna consentir a questo poco di errore che è di pigliarsi qualche piacere in gioventù, che se ne va poi con l'acqua benedetta. . . . E però in tutto quello che io ti ragionerò presupponendo questo poco di peccato, per esser necessario, procurerò quanto più sia possibile l'onore del mondo, e che quei piaceri che si hanno da pigliarsi sieno presi con tal destrezza e con tal ingegno, ch non si rimanga vituperato appresso de le genti.¹⁴

Margarita's husband is constantly away on business; she is bored and feels neglected. By the end of the dialogue, Raffaella has convinced Margarita to embark on an adulterous affair with a young man named messer Aspasio (who bears more than a passing resemblance to Piccolomini himself).¹⁵ It becomes abundantly clear to the reader that convincing Margarita to sleep with messer Aspasio has been Raffaella's goal all along. As the dialogue ends, Margarita looks forward eagerly to her planned affair, completely unaware of how she has been manipulated by the older woman. She exults,

Having learned today through your words that a young woman needs, to avoid greater errors, to pour out her spirit in her youth, and having heard certainly from you the good words of messer Aspasio and the love he bears me, I am resolved to give all of myself to him for the rest of my life.

And thus having pledged eternal fidelity to messer Aspasio—whom she has barely met—Margarita goes on to offer the impoverished Raffaella bread, cheese, and ham as a reward for her kindness.¹⁶

Given its subject matter, it is not surprising that some readers interpreted *La Raffaella* as an attack on women's moral character: older women are presented as corrupt and amoral; younger women as hedonistic and naive. Women of all ages, it seems, are concerned primarily with deceiving men to obtain sexual pleasure. Beyond its general cynicism regarding female virtue, *La Raffaella* also gives precise and effective direction on ways to deceive one's husband and to discreetly carry on long-term affairs. Raffaella warns Margarita against writing love letters—especially if her lover is married.¹⁷ She recommends that her lover be unmarried, if possible (messer Aspasio is a bachelor!).¹⁸ Raffaella tells Margarita she will need a trusted servant to communicate with her lover, and that she should choose that person with great care.¹⁹ She recommends a rope ladder for giving a lover access to private rooms without anyone in the household knowing.²⁰

Raffaella encourages Margarita to take full advantage of the pleasures that wealth and leisure can bring, but she insists that all these pleasures are worthless without the final consummation of adulterous sex:

What's love worth without its end? It's like an egg without salt, and worse. Holidays, dinners, banquets, masques, plays, gatherings at villas and a thousand other similar pleasures are icy and cold without love. And with love they are so pleasurable and so sweet that I don't believe that one could ever grow old among them. In every person love inspires courtesy, nobility, elegance in dress, eloquence in speech, graceful gestures, and every other good thing. Without love, they are little esteemed, like lost and empty things.

E amore poi che val, senza il suo fine? Quel ch'è l'uovo senza'l sale, e peggio. Le feste, i conviti, i banchetti, le mascere, le comedie, i ritruovi di villa

e mille altri così fatti solazzi senz'amore son freddi e ghiacci; e con esso son di tanta consolazione e così fatta dolcezza, ch'io non credo che fra loro si potesse invecchiare mai. Amor riforma in altrui la cortesia, la gentilezza, il garbo di vestire, la eloquenza del parlare, i movimenti agraziati e ogni altra bella parte; e senza esso son poco apprezzate, quasi come cose perdute e vane.²¹

The "end" of love, which in Neoplatonic treatises was seen as a beatific transcendence of earthly desires, is here clearly redefined simply as sex.²² As a result of passages like this, *La Raffaella* was attacked both as an insult to women and as an instruction manual for adultery.²³ That the text was explicitly dedicated by Piccolomini to "the women who will read it" ("A quelle donne che leggeranno") only made matters worse.²⁴

Piccolomini was destined from youth for an ecclesiastical career,²⁵ and at the time he wrote *La Raffaella* he was starting to make a name for himself in Italian intellectual circles.²⁶ He had published *La Raffaella* under his academic pseudonym, Stordito Intronato, but this did little to conceal his identity. Responding to criticism of the dialogue, Piccolomini disavowed *La Raffaella* almost immediately, writing in 1540 that the text was a "joke," written only for his own amusement.²⁷ Clearly, he felt that *La Raffaella's* scandalous reputation was not suitable for his public image and future aspirations. Unlike Aretino, who published the *Ragionamenti* in two installments, Piccolomini not only never published a sequel to *La Raffaella*, he never wrote anything like it again.²⁸ In his retractions, Piccolomini insisted that he had meant no insult to women in *La Raffaella*, and compared his work to the licentious *novelle* in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, intended to give "a certain pleasure to the mind, that cannot always be serious and grave" ("per dare un certo solazzo a la mente, che sempre severa e grave non può già stare").²⁹ Although Piccolomini consistently downplayed the dialogue's significance, *La Raffaella* remained in print and remained popular. There were nine Italian editions in the sixteenth century, as well as three separate translations into French.³⁰ Indeed, *La Raffaella* is the most frequently republished of all Piccolomini's texts, and one of the few still in print in the twenty-first century.³¹

Though criticized for its licentiousness, generically *La Raffaella* was in the mainstream of the literature of its time. Neoplatonic dialogues dealing with love and sexuality were a staple of Italian literary and academic culture, from Bembo's *Asolani* (1505) and Judah Abrabanel's *Dialogi d'amore* (1535), to Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo d'amore* (1542), and Tullia d'Aragona's *Dialogo . . . della infinità d'amore* (1547). Along with books on love, books on the status of women and on feminine deportment were also produced in great numbers in Italy in the mid-sixteenth century. Advocating adultery may have been scandalous, but men telling women how to behave was commonplace. Besides internationally influential texts such as Juan-Luis Vives' *De institutione feminae christianae* (1523)³² and Baldassare Castiglione's *Cortegiano* (1528),³³ there were dozens of lesser known or more specialized books, such as Giovanni Trissino's epistle on appropriate conduct for

widows (1524),³⁴ and Galeazzo Flavio Capella's treatise on the excellence and dignity of women (1526).³⁵ The vast majority of these texts were written by men, and many were prescriptive works that attempted to define appropriate female conduct.³⁶ Of 125 works listed by Marie-Françoise Piéjus dealing with the status of women published in Italy between 1471 and 1560, only two were authored by women: Tullia d'Aragona's 1547 *Dialogo . . . della infinità d'amore* and Laura Terracina's 1550 *Discorso sopra tutti li primi canti d'Orlando Furioso*.³⁷

Given Piccolomini's deep engagement with academic and literary culture, it is not surprising that *La Raffaella* draws on a wide range of contemporary texts. The character of Raffaella herself has a strong resemblance to the central figure of the procuress from Fernando de Rojas' *La Celestina*,³⁸ and passages in Piccolomini's dialogue closely echo debates over proper feminine dress in Castiglione's *Cortegiano*.³⁹ But arguably the most important model for *La Raffaella* remains Aretino's *Ragionamenti*.⁴⁰ To begin with, there are precise textual echoes: *La Raffaella*'s discussion of cosmetics closely follows passages from Aretino's work,⁴¹ as does Raffaella's reference to the illicit sexual activities of nuns.⁴² Even Raffaella's notion, quoted above, that youthful sins can be removed with holy water, recalls a speech by Antonia about the relative insignificance of the sins committed by whores.⁴³

Beyond her similarity to the title character of *La Celestina*, Piccolomini's Raffaella also recalls the Midwife from the sixth book of the *Ragionamenti*. Certainly, the Midwife's following account of her own techniques are a good description of Raffaella, who comes across as a pious churchgoer, says she loves Margarita like a daughter, and has endless advice on fashions and hairstyles:

It was always my habit to sniff through twenty-five churches every morning, robbing here a tatter of the Gospel, there a scrap of *orate fratres*, here a droplet of *santus santus*, at another spot a teeny bit of *non sum dignus*, and over there a nibble of *erat verbum*, watching all the while this man and that girl, that man and this other woman. . . . A bawd's work is thrilling, for by making herself everyone's friend and companion, stepchild and godmother, she sticks her nose in every hole. All the new styles of dress in Mantua, Ferrara, and Milan follow the model set by the bawd; and she invents all the different ways of arranging hair used in the world. In spite of nature she remedies every fault of breath, teeth, lashes, tits, hands, faces, inside and out, fore and aft.

Io che ho sempre avuto in costume di fiutar venticinque chiese per mattina, rubando qui un brindello di vangelo, ivi uno schiantolo di *orate fratres*, là un giocciolo di *santus santus*, in quel luogo un pochetto di *non sum dignus*, e altrove un bocconicino di *erat verbum*, e squadrando sempre questo e quella, e quello e questa. . . . Bella industria è quella d'una ruffiana che, col farsi ognun compare e comare, ognun figilozzo e santolo, si ficca per ogni buco. Tutte le forge nuove di Mantova, di Ferrara, e di Milano pigliano la sceda da la ruffiana: ella trova tutte l'usanze de le acconciature

dei capi del mondo; ella, al dispetto de la natura, menda ogni difetto e di fiati e di denti e di ciglia e di pocce e di mani e di facce e di fuori e di dentro e di dietro e dinanzi.⁴⁴

In his *Novelle* (1554), Matteo Bandello mistakenly attributed *La Raffaella* to Aretino, in part because of its resemblance to the *Ragionamenti*.⁴⁵ Clearly, the similarity of the two texts was apparent to contemporary readers. Socially and intellectually, Piccolomini and Aretino were on friendly terms in the years immediately following *La Raffaella*'s publication. Piccolomini wrote to Aretino in December 1540, publicly praising his satirical attacks on the abuses of the powerful.⁴⁶ And in 1541, two years after *La Raffaella* appeared in print, Piccolomini invited Aretino to join the newly founded *Accademia degli Infiammati* in Padua.

As Marie-Françoise Piéjus has suggested, both the *Ragionamenti* and *La Raffaella* function as parodies of the ubiquitous conduct books addressed to women in the mid-sixteenth century. The *Ragionamenti* and *La Raffaella* are "provocative text[s], animated by an ironic cynicism that, parod[ies] point by point the lessons habitually taught to women." By focusing on women's sexual lives, both Aretino and Piccolomini "attest to the divorce between openly affirmed principles and the daily conduct of [their] contemporaries."⁴⁷ What makes these texts parodic is their sexual subject matter; they both, in differing ways, affirm women's fundamental sexuality and attest to the central role of sexual desire in women's lives. This is precisely the aspect of femininity that most of the conduct books are trying most urgently to restrain, repress, and police. The vast majority of sixteenth-century conduct books written for women are designed to make women into good wives: chaste, silent, and obedient—pleasing to their husbands and compliant to the wishes of their male relatives.⁴⁸

It is telling that these two parodic texts are both written in the voice of women. Rather than having a male author lay down the law for women (like Vives does), or imagining a conversation where women listen silently as men debate (as in Castiglione), both the *Ragionamenti* and *La Raffaella* imagine female conversations with no men present. In *Ventriloquized Voices*, her study of early modern male authors' adoption of female voices, Elizabeth Harvey has argued that "in male appropriations of feminine voices we can see what is most desired and most feared about women."⁴⁹ If Harvey is right, what Aretino and Piccolomini most desired and feared about women was their sexuality—and the ways their sexuality creates possibilities for female agency.

In both the *Ragionamenti* and *La Raffaella*, an older woman instructs a younger one on issues of gender and sexuality—and on ways to trick men to get what they want. In both cases, the absence of male auditors creates the illusion that the reader is privy to the secret truth of feminine speech. It is significant that both Aretino and Piccolomini imagine that the main topic that women discuss in private is their sexual relations with men. While the conversation in both the *Ragionamenti* and *La Raffaella* is wide-ranging, both dialogues arguably fail the Bechdel test—an assessment that asks whether or not a work of fiction has two

named female characters who talk to each other about something other than their relationships to men.⁵⁰ In both works, the women are constantly concerned about their interactions with men and how their actions are perceived by men. The very categories of female life as set forth in the *Ragionamenti*—nuns, wives, and whores—are defined by the ways in which women's sexual relations with men (or their lack) are structured and determined.

In their desire to hear the truth of female sexuality, both the *Ragionamenti* and *La Raffaella* metaphorically echo a tradition of masculine fantasy in which female genitalia are compelled to speak. In the thirteenth-century French fabliau *Du Chevalier qui fist les cons parler* [*The Knight Who Made Cunts Speak*], a poor, wandering knight who treats some bathing fairies with courtesy and discretion is rewarded with the magical power to make vaginas talk.⁵¹ He uses this power to discover the truth in situations where people are lying to him: when he encounters a miserly priest riding on a mare, he makes the mare's vagina tell him how much money the priest is hiding. When a countess sends her maid to seduce the knight, he makes the maid's vagina reveal the plot. Eventually, he makes even the countess testify against herself by compelling her nether regions to speak.⁵² The vagina, it seems, always tells the truth. This provocative trope reappears most famously in Denis Diderot's 1748 libertine novel *Les Bijoux indiscrets* [*The Indiscreet Jewels*], in which a sultan has a magic ring that makes vaginas tell all.

While there is no evidence that either Aretino or Piccolomini were aware of such tales of talking vaginas, the gender dynamics of their texts are remarkably similar. The trope of a man magically forcing a vagina to speak is culturally resonant on a number of levels. On the most basic level, these stories are fantasies of masculine power: the masterful male commands the female body to do his bidding and reveal its knowledge. There is comedy, of course, in the blurring of function between vagina and mouth—the earthy lower body inevitably tells a tale that refutes the refined upper body. It is important to note that what the vagina says does not merely contradict what the mouth says; it unerringly reveals the hidden truth of the situation. Just as the *Ragionamenti* and *La Raffaella* ironically imagine the sexual desires hidden behind a public façade of decorous femininity, in these stories, the mouth tells lies, but the vagina tells the truth of the body; it cannot lie. Indeed, in all these texts, the vagina is the truth, the essence, the thing itself. The truth of woman is her sex.

The same assumption underlies Eve Ensler's popular 1996 feminist play *The Vagina Monologues*, an episodic work in which women of various ages and backgrounds recount their sexual experiences, some positive, others negative. While the play was acclaimed for giving voice to women's sexuality, it was also criticized for reducing women to their genitalia: as feminist scholars and activists Susan E. Bell and Susan M. Reverby wrote, "*The Vagina Monologues* re-inscribes women's politics in our bodies, indeed in our vaginas alone."⁵³ But of course, in Ensler's work, the author who wrote the lines and the actors who perform them are all women. The voices we hear are the women's voices—not men's imagination of what a woman's voice might sound like if there was no man there to hear

and record it. In Aretino and Piccolomini's vagina dialogues, it is always only men talking—even if the characters are female.

Piccolomini's ventriloquized fantasy of female speech in *La Raffaella* is all the more remarkable given that the Academy of the Intronati,⁵⁴ the organization under whose auspices he published the dialogue, was more arguably more open to women than any other sixteenth-century Italian academy. The Accademia degli Intronati [the Academy of the Stunned] was founded in 1525 by a group of six Siennese young men. The avowed object of the group was "to promote poetry and eloquence in the Tuscan, Latin and Greek languages" and their motto was: *Orare, Studere, Gaudere, Neminem laedere, Neminem credere, De mundo non curare* [Pray, Study, Rejoice, Harm no one, Believe no one, Have no care for the world].⁵⁵ Membership in the Intronati was restricted to men, but as Alexandra Collier has argued, "women were awarded much more than a merely ornamental presence within the context of the academy [of the Intronati], whether as sources of inspiration, correspondents in educationally-oriented literary exchanges, or as discussants in female-centered dialogues."⁵⁶

Sometime around 1536, not long before he wrote *La Raffaella*, Piccolomini himself wrote a brief *Orazione in lode delle donne* [Oration in Praise of Women]. He delivered the oration to the Intronati in person on his return to Siena from Padua in 1542 and it was published three years later.⁵⁷ Utterly rejecting *La Raffaella*'s notion that love must be sexually consummated to have any real value, Piccolomini's oration draws heavily on the Neoplatonic idealization of love articulated in Pietro Bembo's *Asolani*, and in Bembo's concluding speech in the Fourth Book of Castiglione's *Cortegiano*. In this discourse, love is primarily a spiritual discipline that paradoxically leads to a transcendence of physical desire. Women's beauty is an earthly echo of divine Beauty, and Beauty can be used by the lover to reach a higher plane of spiritual awareness.⁵⁸ Women are thus to be served, adored, and obeyed, in the way that a Courtier should serve, adore, and obey his Prince.⁵⁹

Many texts written by members of the Intronati were dedicated to female patrons, including a translation of six books of Virgil's *Aeneid* and Piccolomini's own 1540 translation of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, a classic treatise on household management.⁶⁰ A text from the later sixteenth century, Girolamo Bargagli's 1575 *Dialogo de' giuochi* [Dialogue on Games], describes the activities of the Intronati in the 1530s, and attests to the support of the Academy by "many beautiful and noble ladies" ("Molte belle e rare gentildonne").⁶¹ Some scholars have suggested that women may have even participated in meetings of the Academy, a rare occurrence in sixteenth-century Italian intellectual culture.⁶² An unpublished dialogue by Marcantonio Piccolomini, a kinsman of Alessandro and a founding member of the Intronati, imagines a scholarly dialogue between three Siennese gentlewomen on whether God created women by chance or by design.⁶³

At the outset, however, not all the Intronati were so welcoming to women—at least if Antonio Vignali's *Cazzaria* (1525) is any indication. Vignali's dialogue, in many ways a defense of sexual relations between men, is a fiercely and crudely

misogynist text, a product of an exclusively male environment that denigrates women at every turn.⁶⁴ The *Cazzaria* was a scandalous text. It was initially circulated in manuscript among the Academy's members and was probably printed without its author's consent. Although it was not publicly acknowledged or defended by the Intronati at any point, it was nonetheless written by one of the Academy's founding members and was one of the most prominent products of the Academy's early years.⁶⁵ Piccolomini was surely familiar with the text—indeed, his kinsman Marcantonio Piccolomini (Sodo Intronato) appears as one of *La Cazzaria*'s main characters.⁶⁶ However eccentric and outrageous it may be, *La Cazzaria* is arguably an accurate reflection of the attitudes towards women of at least some of the Intronati's founding members. If the Intronati's respectful and inclusive attitude towards women represented in Bargagli's *Dialogo de' giuochi* is to be believed, things must have changed a lot by the late 1530s. But it is quite possible that the Intronati's relatively positive public attitude towards women masked more negative private views. Perhaps Alessandro Piccolomini's ironic attitude towards women in *La Raffaella* is a product of this conflict.

As we have seen, the *Ragionamenti*'s attitude towards its female speakers is always ambivalent. But *La Raffaella*'s presentation of its speakers is much more straightforward. Raffaella is a manipulative woman who is working throughout with a very specific goal in mind—to convince Margarita to have an adulterous affair with messer Aspasio. Margarita is simply a dupe. Whatever Piccolomini's praise of women, whatever support the Intronati gave and received from Sieneese noblewomen, *La Raffaella* ironically suggests that women are fundamentally submissive to male desire. Raffaella's considerable ingenuity is entirely subordinate to the schemes of messer Aspasio. She has no other function than to help him obtain his desires, and she is in many ways an abject character, forced to make her living by tricking young women into having sex with manipulative men.

Piccolomini's idealistic role as defender of women in his *Orazione* and elsewhere has an ironic echo in the dedicatory epistle to female readers that prefaces *La Raffaella*. Here Piccolomini insists that he has always been a staunch defender of women against their detractors. He claims that *La Raffaella* clearly shows "the appropriate life and manners appropriate for a young, noble, beautiful woman," and holds up the character of Raffaella as proof that women are capable of "great concepts and profound statements and good judgment."⁶⁷ He decries the double standard that sees extra-marital affairs as "honorable and great" for men, and "utterly shameful for women." He admits that if a woman were to be so foolish as to conduct an affair in a way that would arouse suspicion, that would be "a great error," but he trusts that his female readers "will be full of so much prudence, and temperance that [they] will know how to maintain and enjoy [their] lovers" for years and years. "There is nothing more pleasing nor more worthy of a gentlewoman than this."⁶⁸ In the epistle, Piccolomini is doubling down on the joke that underlies *La Raffaella* as a whole: what women want most of all is satisfying sex with an attractive and flattering young man. Anyone who helps them attain this goal becomes their greatest champion.

As we have seen, Aretino's *Ragionamenti* argue at length that at least some women prefer money, status, and power to sexual pleasure. But this is largely because the whores of the *Ragionamenti* are not comfortable, upper-class women like those in *La Raffaella*. Aretino's whores want power, but his nuns and wives, whose material well-being is secured either by the Church or by their husbands, want sex. In the more elevated world of *La Raffaella*, the wealthy and well-born Margarita lives in luxury; all that is missing from her pleasurable life is a satisfying sexual partner. The condition of Nanna, Pippa, Antonia—and indeed of Raffaella, Piccolomini's impoverished elderly bawd—is much more precarious. The single-minded pursuit of sexual pleasure, it seems, is a privilege of the upper classes, of those women who are not compelled to participate directly in a capitalist market for goods and services in which their sexuality is primarily a commodity used to raise capital.

Aretino's attitude to women is often disdainful and dismissive; Piccolomini almost always flatters his female readers. And yet, it is the *Ragionamenti* that imagine autonomous women who manage to hold their own in conflict with men, whereas *La Raffaella* presents women who are entirely dominated by men in one way or another. The *Ragionamenti* fantasize about the ways in which women trick men; *La Raffaella* fantasizes about the ways women can be tricked.

Aretino's Nanna provides a powerful contrast to Piccolomini's fantasy of feminine submission. In Book 2 of the *Ragionamenti*, when Nanna recounts her experiences as a wife, she does exactly what Raffaella urges Margarita to do—she takes young lovers who can satisfy her sexually in ways her impotent husband cannot. But the key difference is that Nanna makes that choice for herself—she is not tricked into it by a male suitor who is using a female confidant to manipulate her. Even before becoming a prostitute, Nanna is always looking out for herself. She tricks her lovers in the same way she tricks her husband. She plays to win and is never duped. And unlike Margarita, who promises to devote herself exclusively to messer Aspasio, Nanna's adultery is utterly promiscuous:

Once I had seen and understood the lives of wives, in order to keep my end up, I began to satisfy all my passing whims and desires, doing it with all sorts, from potters to great lords, with especial favor extended to the religious orders—friars, monks, and priests.

Io, veduto e inteso la vita delle maritate, per non essere da meno di loro, mi diedi a cavare ogni vogliuza, e volsi provare fino ai facchini e fino ai signori, la frataria, le pretaria, e la monicaria sopra tutto.⁶⁹

Eventually she ends up stabbing her husband to death when he assaults her after catching her having sex with a beggar.⁷⁰ It is hard to imagine Piccolomini's well-bred Margarita acting in a similar manner should her husband ever catch her with messer Aspasio.

Piccolomini's *Raffaella* fits into larger trends in the ways in which Aretino's *Ragionamenti* were read and assimilated into mainstream early modern culture.

Broadly speaking, texts that were inspired or influenced by the *Ragionamenti* adapted Aretino's text in ways that made it less subversive and conformed better to traditional ideas of early modern gender relations. Later editions, translations, and adaptations of the *Ragionamenti* focused on Book 3 of the first day, on the life of whores, and presented the text to readers simply as a catalogue of female deceit and monstrosity in which the satirical and subversive elements of Nanna's character were downplayed in order to make her a purely negative figure.⁷¹

In a similarly reductive move, *La Raffaella* takes the notion that women will attempt to deceive men, and limits it to the particular case of aristocratic wives deceiving their husbands—a model which fits well into traditional discourses of courtly love that go back to the twelfth century.⁷² Women are represented as fundamentally passionate creatures that desire physical pleasures above all else, and these are found more naturally with young men in adulterous relationships than with respectable, mature, and neglectful husbands. Margarita's husband spends too much time on “business” and not enough with his wife, and the well-bred and discreet messer Aspasio is the natural solution to Margarita's problems. Raffaella the bawd is not disrupting traditional aristocratic patterns of behavior, she is facilitating them. As long as the affair remains discreet, everyone will benefit and no one will care. (Machiavelli makes much the same point in his play *Mandragola*, but in that case the satiric irony is obvious.) In *La Raffaella* the extent to which Piccolomini supports Raffaella's argument is not clear. As we have seen, he explicitly endorses her point of view in his dedicatory epistle to his female readers. But the degree of irony in the epistle is an open question.

It is enough that Piccolomini had deniability when he needed it—*La Raffaella*, as he later claimed, was obviously a youthful joke. Later commentators agreed that the dialogue, though seemingly immoral, was actually a witty *jeu d'esprit*. The nineteenth-century scholar and editor Giuseppe Zonta called *La Raffaella* a “jewel of the Renaissance, the most beautiful ‘scene’ that the sixteenth century has left us, in which didactic intent develops deliciously out of a comic drama” (“gioiello della Rinascita, la più bella ‘scena’ che il Cinquecento ci abbia lasciato, dove l'intento didattico deliziosamente si svolge di su una comica trama”).⁷³ Many things have been said about Aretino's *Ragionamenti*, but no one ever claimed that they were a beautiful jewel.

Notes

1 On sixteenth-century editions of *La Raffaella*, see Zonta, ed., *Trattati d'amore*, 379–82; Cerrera, *Alessandro Piccolomini*, 175–77. There are no known surviving copies of the 1539 edition. Zonta believes the first edition may have been published in 1540.

2 Aretino, *Ragionamento della Nanna*; and *Dialogo di M. Pietro Aretino*.

3 Moulton, *Before Pornography*, 132–36.

4 See the dedicatory epistle to “quelle donne che leggeranno,” Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 31. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to *La Raffaella* are to this edition.

5 On prostitution as a form of labor and commerce in the *Ragionamenti* see Moulton, “Whores as Shopkeepers,” 71–86.

- 6 Moulton, *Before Pornography*, 132–36. On Aretino's public image, see Waddington, *Aretino's Satyr*.
- 7 Moulton, *Before Pornography*, 130–31.
- 8 Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 132–33. English translation: Aretino, *Aretino's Dialogues*, 116. All English quotations from the *Ragionamenti* are from this edition.
- 9 Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 115–16; *Aretino's Dialogues*, 102–03.
- 10 See Larivaille, *La Vie quotidienne*, esp. chapter 6 on the economic and personal exploitation of whores and chapter 7 on syphilis. On hierarchies of prostitution, see Ruggiero, *Binding Passions*, 35–37.
- 11 Aretino, *Sei giornate*; *Aretino's Dialogues*, 135–36.
- 12 Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 283–84; *Aretino's Dialogues*, 310.
- 13 Baldi, *Tradizione*, 106–07.
- 14 Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 41. All translations from *La Raffaella* are my own.
- 15 Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 121.
- 16 Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 119.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 101–02.
- 18 *Ibid.*, 94.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 112.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 135 n. 120.
- 23 Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 82–83.
- 24 Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 27.
- 25 Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 86.
- 26 Cerreta, *Alessandro Piccolomini*, 10–48.
- 27 "Molte cose che per scherzo scrisse già in un *Dialogo de la Bella Creanza de le Donne*, fatto di me più per un certo sollazzo, che per altra più grave cagione." Dedicatory epistle to Piccolomini, *De la Institutione*. See Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 7.
- 28 He did publish two comedies: *L'Amor costante* (1540) and *L'Alessandro* (1545). See Cerreta, *Alessandro Piccolomini*, 177–78, 187–88.
- 29 Piccolomini, *De la Institutione* (f. 231r-v). See Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 8.
- 30 Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 81, 161.
- 31 See the 1960 bibliography of Piccolomini's published works in Cerreta, *Alessandro Piccolomini*, 173–96.
- 32 An Italian translation of Vives' *De institutione feminae christianae* was published in Venice in 1546 under the title *De l'institutione de la femina*. A second edition appeared in 1561. Vives' treatise was also the model for Ludovico Dolce's *Della Institutione delle donne* (Venice: Giolito, 1545). Further editions of Dolce's text were published in 1553, 1559, and 1560.
- 33 Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier*.
- 34 Trissino, *Epistola*.
- 35 Capella, *Galeazzo Flavio Capella Milanese*.
- 36 Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady*.
- 37 See the chronological bibliography of 125 works on women published in Italy between 1471 and 1560, Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 156–65. Women did address the issue in unpublished texts, such as the collected letters of Laura Cereta (ca. 1488). See Cereta, *Collected Letters*. Published texts by women were more common in the later years of the sixteenth century. For an overview of "protofeminist" writing in early modern Italy see Campbell and Stampino, eds. *In Dialogue*, 1–13.
- 38 Baldi, *Tradizione*, 99–102. Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 11–15.
- 39 Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 108. On the larger influence of the *Cortegiano* on *La Raffaella*, see Baldi, *Tradizione*, 86–90.
- 40 Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 9. Baldi, *Tradizione*, 100–07.
- 41 Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 106, 118, 126.
- 42 Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 43.

- 43 Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 139; *Aretino's Dialogues*, 158.
- 44 Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 285, 291; *Aretino's Dialogues*, 312, 318.
- 45 Bandello, *Novelle*, 1.34. Included in a list of licentious books, along with the poems of Petrarch, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. See Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 83.
- 46 Cerreta, *Alessandro Piccolomini*, 43–44. Piccolomini and Aretino corresponded in 1540–41. Five letters from Piccolomini to Aretino are included in Marcolini, ed., *Lettere scritte*. See also Cerreta, *Alessandro Piccolomini*, 253–54.
- 47 "De là naît, comme dans les *Ragionamenti*, un texte provocateur, animé pare une ironie cynique qui, parodiant point par point les leçons habituellement données aux femmes, renverse la finalité d'une conduite désormais subordonnée à la recherche du plaisir"; "Piccolomini constate, comme l'Arétin, un divorce entre les principes ouvertement affirmés et la conduite quotidienne de ses contemporains." Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 147–48. My translation.
- 48 Kelso, *Doctrine*, 78–135.
- 49 Harvey, *Ventriloquized Voices*, 32.
- 50 The Bechdel–Wallace test was first outlined in 1985 in Allison Bechdel's comic strip *Dykes to Watch Out For*. See Alison Bechdel, "The Rule," in *Dykes to Watch Out For* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1986), 22. Bechdel attributes the idea to her friend Liz Wallace, and says the ultimate source is a passage in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*. See also Selisker, "The Bechdel Test."
- 51 Rossia and Straub, eds., *Fabliaux Érotiques*, 199–239.
- 52 In order to silence her vagina, the Countess stuffs it with cotton, but the Knight is able to make her anus speak as well, and all is revealed.
- 53 Bell and Reverby, "Vaginal Politics," 435.
- 54 On the Intronati, see Constantini, *L'Accademia*.
- 55 Maylender, *Storie delle accademie d'Italia*, vol. 3, 354–58.
- 56 Coller, "The Sienese Accademia," 223. See also Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 86–103.
- 57 Coller, "The Sienese Accademia," 224. A second edition of the Orazione appeared in 1549. See Cerreta, *Alessandro Piccolomini*, 189.
- 58 Moulton, *Love in Print*, 48–53.
- 59 Piéjus, "L'Orazione," 547. Coller, "The Sienese Accademia," 225.
- 60 Piccolomini translated one of the six books of the *Aeneid*. For these and other examples, see Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 91–96.
- 61 Bargagli, *Dialogo de' giuochi*, 22. Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 89.
- 62 Ibid. She cites Elena De' Vecchi, *Alessandro Piccolomini*, in *Bulletino Senese di Storia Patria* (1934), 426.
- 63 Piéjus, "Venus Bifrons," 93–96. The untitled dialogue is roughly contemporaneous with *La Raffaella*.
- 64 Vignali, *La Cazzaria*, 40–41.
- 65 Ibid., 21–26.
- 66 As well as appearing in *La Cazzaria* and being the author of the aforementioned scholarly dialogue between three women, Marcantonio Piccolomini (1504–79) also appears as the primary speaker of Bargagli's *Dialogo de' giuochi*.
- 67 Piccolomini, *La Raffaella*, 29.
- 68 "Io vi confesso bene, poiché gli uomini fuori di ogni ragione tirannicamente hanno ordinato leggi, volendo che una medesima cosa a le donne sia vituperosissima e a loro sia onore e grandezza, poich'egli è così, vi confesso e dico che quando una donna pensasse di guidare un amore con poco saviezza, in maniera che n'avesse da nascere un minimo sospettuzzo, farebbe grandissimo errore, e io più che altri ne l'animo mio la biasmarei: perché io conosco benissimo che a le donne importa il tutto questa cosa. Ma se, da l'altro canto, donne mie, voi sarete piene di tanta prudenza e accortezza e temperanza, che voi sappiate mantenervi e godervi l'amante vostro, elletto che ve l'avete, fin che durano gli anni vostri così nascostamente, che né l'aria, né il ne possa sospicar mai, in questo caso dico e vi giuro che non potete far cosa di maggior contento e più degna di una gentil-donna che questa." Ibid., 30–31.

- 69 Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 89; *Aretino's Dialogues*, 102.
 70 Aretino, *Sei giornate*, 90; *Aretino's Dialogues*, 103.
 71 Such texts include *Colloquio de las Damas* (Seville, 1548); *Le Miroir des Courtisans* (Lyon, 1580); *Pornodidascalus seu Colloquium Muliebre* (Frankfurt, 1623); and *The Crafty Whore* (London, 1648). See Moulton, "Crafty Whores," and Moulton, *Before Pornography*, 152–57.
 72 On Courtly Love as a cultural phenomenon, see Newman, ed., *The Meaning of Courtly Love*. On the cultural origins of courtly love, see Boase, *The Origin and Meaning*.
 73 Zonta, ed. *Trattati d'amore*, 377.

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12

GIOVAN BATTISTA DELLA PORTA'S EROTOMANIC ART OF RECOLLECTION

Sergius Kodera

Della Porta's brief thirty-two-page treatise on the art of memory¹ appeared in print in Naples in 1566. There was another edition in 1583; in 1602 Della Porta published a revised Latin version of the text under the title *Ars reminscendi*.² Despite the fact that *The Art of Remembering* did not see nearly as many press runs as Della Porta's more famous works on natural magic and physiognomy, and despite (or because of?) its brevity, his art of memory was frequently utilized by seventeenth-century preachers.³ Given its author's dubious reputation with Catholic orthodoxy—and his constant difficulties with the Inquisition—this popularity might seem quite amazing.⁴ In both a series of articles and a book chapter, Lina Bolzoni has discussed *The Art of Remembering*; my contribution here seeks to elaborate on Bolzoni's work by examining the function of a peculiar sequence of images appearing in Della Porta's text—images that influence the entire structure and character of *The Art of Remembering*. Della Porta recommends the use of explicit sexual fantasies as the most powerful images for organizing the process of recollection. The use of erotic images was not uncommon in the medieval and early modern tradition of the art of memory. Yet in Della Porta's text, images depicting sex between human beings and animals are amazingly prominent (and especially in the two Italian versions of the *Arte del ricordare* than in the later Latin *Ars reminscendi*). Here I will argue that Della Porta's use of pornographic and even, in the modern sense of the word, sodomitic imagery is not merely a consequence of the more innovative aspects of his instructions for developing the capacities of memory. Rather, these images resonate in other of Della Porta's numerous and highly influential texts—namely, his texts for the theater, on human physiognomy, natural magic, cross-breeding, and marvels (*meraviglia*) in general. Such pornographic images thus refer to the core topics of his most important texts—and, accordingly, to his general endeavors as an early modern magus.⁵

The art of memory

Basically, the art of memory consists of imagining a spatial structure—for instance, a house with different rooms (*loci*)—and then furnishing these spaces with objects and persons (*imagines*).⁶ The next step is to walk through the rooms of this imagined building and to assign to each one item one wishes to recall, in the precise order of movement through the architectonic structure. Originally developed in classical antiquity for public orators, this method allows a speaker to recall the general content and order of a speech, but the “art of memory” was also used to recollect specific sequences of words. In this “art,” it is crucial to visualize and memorize a mental structure, with its *loci* and *imagines*, in the greatest possible detail. To facilitate this formidable task, the masters of the art of memory frequently recommended that the images have a strong emotional nature (*imagines agentes*). Conspicuously, manuals for the art therefore often recommend erotically charged images as *imagines agentes*.⁷ Remembrance thus becomes dependent on—and simultaneously synonymous with—exercising vivid (and, as we shall see, predominantly *male*) sexual fantasies. The imaginary *loci* populated by a sequence of well-ordered and striking images tend to acquire a life of their own. As Bolzoni writes: “it is easy to imagine how centuries of experience in memory techniques have given scholars some idea of the complex nature of mental images and their capacity to *inhabit* their creators, to come alive and escape their control.”⁸ And yet the affective movement of the soul, produced by recalling a set of emotionally charged images, clashes with the imperative of order that is the other vital aspect of the art of memory.⁹ Thus—in contrast to modern literary authors who acknowledge and actively employ this same phenomenon in developing their texts—the masters of memory were faced with the arduous task of restraining the life of their own figments.¹⁰

Della Porta’s mnemotechniques

Della Porta’s approach to the topic is characterized by a methodical pluralism that is typical for the art of memory. Along with the basic principles outlined above, he presents different ways of organizing memory.¹¹ For example, he recommends memorizing a group of ten to twenty women whom one has loved to organize a system of pleasant and striking mnemonic images. He contends that when employing the *phantasmata* of women one has made love to or one has desired, one can succeed in remembering not only one word, but an entire verse or even several verses.¹² Della Porta also states one particular system as his most innovative and preferred innovative contribution to the art. For setting up the *loci*, he recommends memorizing little neutral cubicles eight palms long, each populated with different impressive personae: here, the sexually attractive women one has made love to or has been in love with are placed alongside cubicles occupied by friends, jesters, noblemen, and matrons.¹³ Della Porta accordingly recommends the use not only of men and women personal acquaintances, but also of character

types—especially from comedy—that during the sixteenth century were populating contemporary stage plays. In this respect, *The Art of Remembering* follows a widespread tradition in sixteenth-century treatises, as seen for example in Lodovico Dolce's contemporaneous *Dialogo del modo di accrescere e conservare la memoria* (1562).¹⁴ Another important precept in Porta's *Art of Remembering* is that the sequence of personae must vary; for example, he suggests "a woman, a boy, a girl, a relative, an elderly man."¹⁵ It is crucial to note that this succession of personae is as fixed as the structure of the cubicles where they are placed—which they "inhabit," as it were. This implies that the personae become part of the spatial setting, of the architecture of the memory palace, the *locus*.¹⁶ These loci/personae determine the temporal sequence in which the *images* appear, and in turn the content to be memorized in the correct sequence (this content I will term the *memorandum*). In contrast to the fixed personae, Della Porta defines the images as "animated pictures" which we construct or spin out (*fingere/recamare*) using the faculty of fantasy to represent things and words.¹⁷ The images are mobile and variable: they constitute what the personae in their fixed sequence *do*. And these activities must be extraordinary in every respect; clothed in lavish and shining robes, the personae's movements should resemble larger-than-life actors, presenting the mind with a "painting that is new, strange, marvelous, unusual, pleasant, varied, and horrific (*spaventevole*)."¹⁸ Moreover, an image should also be composed of a variable set of living and dead objects, which, like stage props, are added to the persona—for instance, a cornucopia or a swan. Della Porta recommends the use of relatively few loci/personae, condensing the sequence of *memoranda* to a maximum of ten *images agentes*, as comic and tragic playwrights would.¹⁹ One cannot help speculating that Della Porta discloses here a vital aspect of his writing techniques as a prolific and influential author of comedies.²⁰ He obviously followed the advice of his predecessors, shaping his personae in ways reminiscent of the exceedingly grotesque personae in his mannerist comedies.²¹ The most salient feature of these plays is that they use a limited set of characters whose social roles and statues are fixed in a set of stock scenes.²² The practicability of this system is obvious, because there is no need to memorize hundreds of loci and *images*. Yet there is one obvious difficulty. This artificial memory is rather limited, because it will only allow the practitioner to memorize one story (or a sequence of ten words).

Della Porta's *ars oblivionis*

This limitation is, of course, a general difficulty for the art. From the time of its invention, the *ars memoria* has entailed an *ars oblivionis*, an art of forgetting, that in turn allows for the memory to be organized anew. This is a difficult task, because laboriously constructed chains of association between personae, *images*, and *memoranda* must now be erased.²³ Della Porta says that if we wish to remember a new story or a new set of words, we can assign the *same* set of personae, in the same sequence, the task of forging a new sequence of images.

To this aim, we must imagine the fixed sequence of personae in their cubicles, with these “usual suspects” stripped naked or merely covered in white sheets, all in identical upright posture, leaning with their shoulders against the walls of their cells.²⁴ In Della Porta’s system, the sequence of personae set in neutral cubicles is a permanent pattern. He compares the personae to the lines on a specially varnished sheet for musical compositions; it is inscribed with permanent lines, but what is written onto them can be washed off. Thus, just as the musical notes (or signs) are impermanent and can be reinscribed onto that sheet in a new order, creating a new melody, so the old *imagines agentes* may be erased, with the personae free to assume the pose of new *imagines agentes*.²⁵ It is not only the architectonic structure that functions as locus; the personae (who are usually classified as “images”) become an aspect or a part of “place.”²⁶ The personae assume the paradoxical role of living statues—and this oxymoron aptly circumscribes the self-contradictory function of the memory images: in order to impersonate new *imagines agentes*, they should be plasmatic, but at the same time their bodies must remain precisely fixed in dress, comportment, gesture, and the corresponding affects communicated by these visual traits. However, Della Porta prescribes that even when the personae are imagined naked, leaning against the wall—in order to prepare them for a new role in another story—they should not be the neutral recipients of images. Rather, they must be imagined in a highly individualized form. And their actions are not arbitrary: Della Porta prescribes constructing these stock characters of the imagination in the most fitting way with respect to “age, facial traits, occupation, and comportment (*mores*).”²⁷ The personae’s actions are predetermined by their sex, social status, and concomitant habits. Moreover, these actions of the personae—who become the permanent abodes of the variable *imagines*—have to be related to the content of the word or the story to be remembered. Della Porta’s technique of character development was an important and original modification of the traditional system of loci and *imagines*.²⁸

In this way, the formal structure of the memory is brought into a strong—and reciprocal—relationship with the content that is to be memorized. In a key example, Della Porta writes that the entire story of Andromeda can be remembered by the image of a naked, shivering, and wailing woman chained to a rock.²⁹ The setup of highly individualized loci/personae is vital for the intricate task of memorizing a *sequence* of individual images. Since more than one image is required, the spatial arrangement of the personae/*imagines* becomes very important.

The Latin version of *The Art of Remembering* supplies the following example: if the word to be remembered is *avis* (bird) and the cubicle is inhabited by the persona of a boy, then he should be Ganymede; if it is “cook” then he cooks the bird;³⁰ if the word is *taurus* (bull) and a robust boy inhabits the cubicle, then we should imagine Hercules wrestling with Achelous;³¹ if we wish to remember horn (*cornus*) and a virgin inhabits the cubicle, we visualize her covered in flowers and fruits, like a Naiad with a cornucopia in hand.³²

The Italian *Arte del ricordare* gives different examples.³³ If we suppose the word “bird” to be the memorandum for a prostitute (*meretrice*), Della Porta suggests constructing an image of Leda during sexual intercourse with Jupiter in the guise of a swan.³⁴ This direction is confirmed in many other examples: for instance, under the memorandum “bull” in the locus/persona of a virgin, we might imagine the rape of Europa.³⁵ If the memorandum “bull” embodies the locus/persona of a *meretrice* (prostitute), then we should forge an image of Pasiphaë having sexual intercourse with the bull.³⁶ There is no doubt that the imagery of the vernacular *Arte del ricordare* is more graphic, more sexually explicit, and less polished than the later Latin version. Yet all the versions recommend sexually explicit, or at least erotically charged, *imagines agentes*. Another striking feature of Della Porta's examples is that all memoranda—the “bulls,” “horns”—are words with sexual connotations. Of course, *uccello* “bird” in Italian denotes the penis; thus, the sexual connotation is as present in the memorandum as in the image.³⁷ This intimate thematic connection highlights the rule that *imago* and memorandum must be as closely related as possible.

These examples reveal that Della Porta wishes his readers to entwine their individual memories of (present or former) personal acquaintances with the stories of classical mythology to construct *imagines agentes*; like interlacing arches, they support the architecture of the memory palace. It seems that the thematic link between *imago agens* and memorandum is rather uncommon in the art of memory. Usually the *imagines agentes* are used as placeholders for *any* content; for example, one could use the *imagines agentes* of naked women to remember any sort of text, not only erotic topics. Della Porta's thematic over-determination would seem to imply that his true interest lay in the actual topics to which the *imagines agentes* and their corresponding memoranda refer; namely, a discourse concerning the human body, the porous boundaries between human beings and animals. Inherent in these tales of sex with animals is the generation of monstrous—marvelous—offspring.

Panoptic visions and living statues

From a Foucaultian perspective, Della Porta's vision of the defenseless personae in their mental prison cells has a panoptic character (though the term here is used, of course, anachronistically). Whereas gazing at naked or sparsely dressed human bodies, even in the imagination, can be considered a form of symbolic violence, it is a technique of visualization in which the different qualities of men and women of various ages, sexes, and professions become—quite brutally—reduced to their physical features, because they are bereft of their clothing and the social insignia, which denote, circumscribe, and protect their social status and their moral integrity. This practice of examining the physical features of naked men and women is echoed in the art of physiognomy of which Della Porta considered himself a master. In fact, in his lavishly illustrated works on the topic we find many depictions of the naked bodies of men and women, with texts

supplying the reader with the character traits (*mores*) ascribed to various medical complexions; that is, the constituent factors of human bodies and their affinities within the animal world.³⁸

Measuring and classifying naked human bodies according to their occupational and concomitant social status was a widespread artistic practice during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries following the techniques for painters described in Leon Battista Alberti's *De pictura* (*On Painting*, 1435). Della Porta very closely echoes and even plagiarizes Alberti, adapting Alberti's instructions for painters into his art of memory. In order to create images that appear lifelike and therefore suited for communicating human emotions, Alberti recommends that painters first draw human figures naked and only subsequently dress them ("ma come a vestrie l'uomo prima si disegna nudo poi il circondiamo i panni").³⁹ In this context, the parallels between Alberti's and Della Porta's ideas are obvious. In order to create emotionally charged *imagines agentes* they must be as lifelike as possible, which means—especially in the case of *erotic* imagines—that we undress the personae. Yet, whereas Alberti had pointed to the appropriate decorum of his images, Della Porta opts for larger-than-life-personae—for grotesque and exaggerated representations.⁴⁰ Another point of reference between the *De pictura* and *The Art of Remembering* is that Alberti links his measurements of human bodies to the proportions of buildings. In Alberti's context, an implied relation of architecture and body clearly results from the process of constructing representations of irregular, organic forms in central perspective. The architectural space must be circumscribed before inserting the non-geometrical figures which are to "inhabit" that space. The parallel to Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering* is striking, since for him as well the personae are an integral part of the loci they inhabit.

Paradoxically, Della Porta's personae can be considered moving statues. On the one hand, they must be imbued with as much life as possible; on the other hand, they must freeze in one position, like a *tableau vivant*. But the idea that moving statues are sexually arousing is much older than Della Porta; Andromeda (one of the key examples in Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*) is described by Ovid as sexually arousing to Perseus, her liberator, because her naked body resembles a marble sculpture. "When Perseus saw [Andromeda], her arms chained to the hard rock, he would have taken her for a marble statue ("marmoreum esset opus"), had not the light breeze stirred her hair, and warm tears streamed from her eyes. Without realizing it, he fell in love ("trahit inscius ignes")."⁴¹ When viewed from the perspective of contemporary theater, Ovid's erotic statue of Andromeda brings to mind the "living statue" of Hermione in Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* (V, 3) or Othello's description of Desdemona's body as "whiter skin . . . than snow" and as "smooth monumental alabaster" (*Othello* V, 2, 4–5). On Shakespeare's stage, this transformational power from living being to statue (and back again, in the mode of comedy) is associated with male violence against women caused by jealousy. Such marble statues may also play an important role in imaginings of pregnant women. In a more general context, tales of walking statues are associated with magical arts, as demonstrated in Apuleius'

Metamorphoses, a work closely associated with magic. Lucius, the protagonist of this second-century Roman novel, describes his arrival in Corinth, the capital of Greek witchcraft:

There was nothing I looked at in the city that didn't believe to be other than it was: I imagined that everything everywhere had been changed by some infernal spell into a different shape – I thought that the very stones I stumbled against must be petrified human beings, . . . and I thought the fountains were liquefied human bodies. I expected statues and pictures to start walking, walls to speak, oxen and other cattle to utter prophecies, . . .⁴²

A magician's power thus is akin to what a master of memory does: turning one thing into another. This topic is intimately linked to Della Porta's other interests in the arts of cross-breeding, of physiognomy, and of natural magic. Yet the relationship between Della Porta's *imagines agentes* and contemporary painting becomes even more striking upon a closer examination of the individual *imagines agentes* reflected in contemporary media.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as represented by Titian's paintings

Virtually all the examples in Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering* refer to the thicket of myths recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. This is no wonder; as the most influential "pagan" text of the Middle Ages and beyond, the *Metamorphoses*⁴³ constitute a substantial encyclopedia of the transformations of the bodies of gods and human beings—transformations caused mostly by violent sexual acts of transgression on the part of gods, heroes, or powerful men upon their helpless victims. Ovid's text is thus a rich source for the primary task of Della Porta's art of memory: not only to associate but to *exchange* one image for another. Moreover, Andromeda, Leda, Ganymede, Io, and Actaeon, to mention but a few of the *imagines* mentioned in the *Ars reminiscendi*, were highly popular subjects for contemporary artistic representation. It is thus no wonder that Della Porta explicitly refers to the paintings of Michelangelo, Rafael, and Titian in his writings.⁴⁴ In the mode of synecdoche, these *imagines agentes* serve as abbreviations for entire stories that are reduced to one single *imago agens*, just as Della Porta had postulated in the case of Andromeda.

Accordingly, Titian's most famous works supply the reader with instructive illustrations for Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*. His key example, Andromeda (in *Perseus and Andromeda* 1554–56), is represented by Titian with a body as white as a marble statue, chained to her rock, with a vivid facial expression, her arms depicted in an unusual, expressive pattern of movement. The same applies to Europa (in *Rape of Europa* 1559–65), with the major difference that she is not shown in an upright position like Andromeda, but instead reclining against the back of the bull/Zeus; both female figures are naked, their sexual organs barely covered by a piece of white transparent garment. In all likelihood, this is what

Della Porta imagined as the *lenzuola* with which the bodies of his personae should be covered in their ground positions. Of course, Titian created many striking erotic female figures. One thinks of his many Venuses, but also his renderings of a seductive *St. Mary Magdalen* (1530–35) or *St. Margaret* (ca. 1565), paintings also remarkable for the impressive movements of their subjects' arms as well as gesture, (lack of) apparel, and extravagant demeanor. The myth of Actaeon is the subject of two of Titian's most impressive paintings: the *Death of Actaeon* (1559) and *The Fate of Actaeon* (1559–75). In the latter painting, the hunter's head is already transformed into the form of a horned stag. With the exception of *Leda and the Swan* (by Michelangelo), nearly all the mythological subjects mentioned in Della Porta's treatise are represented in Titian's most famous works. We thus do not lack examples of contemporary paintings illustrating the *imagines agentes* in Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*. Yet there is one notable exception: the story of Pasiphaë (on whom see below). Like the *imagines agentes* in *The Art of Remembering*, Titian's figures seem to be frozen in their movements, despite their vividness. An entire story is reduced to one spectacular moment—a snapshot (to use an anachronistic term). This reduction is not merely a convenient tool for remembering a myth in a wink of time. It also constitutes an intervention eclipsing all other aspects of the story that are *not* represented in the one *imago agens*.

Titian's paintings, like Della Porta's *imagines*, are evocations of a story in the mode of synecdoche. Alive and dead at the same time, they are fetishistic representations catering to a male gaze, for a specific set of sexual fantasies. Moreover, the fragmentation implicit in this process also allows for a reduction of different myths to a limited set of structural elements or topics which all point to one and the same topic. This is exactly what Della Porta does in the examples given in *The Art of Remembering*; he evokes one and the same topic (for instance, a bull) in various loci/personae and the concomitant *imagines agentes* they enact. Moreover, all the different topics he uses as examples for memoranda (bull, horn, bird) may be subsumed under one single general topic: sex between human beings and animals.

Pasiphaë

As I shall argue in what follows, the myth of Pasiphaë fulfills a paradigmatic function for Della Porta's memory technique, since it corresponds so precisely with his preferred focus in natural magic, the mating of different species and the creation of marvelous monsters. The myth is well known. Pasiphaë falls in love with a bull, has intercourse with the animal, and conceives the Minotaur. The sexual act leading to this monstrous birth is made possible through the cunning intercession of Daedalus. This archetypal male master-engineer from classical antiquity constructs a cow-shaped wooden frame in which Pasiphaë could hide while being penetrated by the bull.⁴⁵ The remarkably imaginative and colorful myth of Pasiphaë thus conjoins illicit sex, the art of the engineer, and the tale of a monstrous offspring.

Pasiphaë is a woman in love with an animal. She has sexual intercourse with a real bull, with her desire thus inclined toward the animal world. Ergo, she impersonates a highly negative image of women in the patriarchal societies through which the myth has travelled. This gender bias is highlighted when we compare Pasiphaë to the rape of Europa.⁴⁶ Both Pasiphaë and Europa are situated in a liminal territory of intersection between the animal, human, and divine—between bodies, souls, and noumenal entities. Indeed, Europa is an inversion of Pasiphaë's story. Zeus here figures as a male lover and a god disguised as a bull who has sexual intercourse with the maid Europa. Her fate is oriented towards the stars. To have sex with a god in animal guise is a ticket to immortality. To have sex as a woman with a real animal leads to ostracism and to the birth of monsters. Thus, it is no wonder that there are copious visualizations in fine art of the myth of Europa, but virtually none of Pasiphaë. From the perspective of the art of memory, we may say that Pasiphaë and Europa, as *imagines agentes*, are inversions of each other.

The mode of synecdoche, whereby an *imago agens* embodies the stories of Europa and Pasiphaë, invites a synoptic perspective on both myths, connecting as intersecting arches in the image of a woman having sex with a bull. But this contradicts the specific image of Pasiphaë observed in the myth, where the woman engaged in sexual intercourse with the animal was a (real) bull covering a (dummy) cow. Pasiphaë in fact disguises herself in what one could call a statue of a cow-like *imago* in the art of memory, thus transforming the dummy cow into a caricature of a "living statue."⁴⁷ Yet this image, on face value, shows an act that can be observed frequently. The myth's image of a cow and a bull mating (again, on face value) cannot qualify as an *imago agens*, nor is it clear why it should be used in Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering* in the locus of the *meretrice*.

This does not mean the wooden cow is irrelevant to the phantasmatic transactions that characterize the basic method of the art of memory, namely to exchange one image for another. For the myth of Pasiphaë points in an oblique way to Daedalus's sublime craftsmanship, his ability to fabricate a wooden image which deceives a bull. Despite the fact that Pasiphaë is a witch (Circe's sister), she seemingly has not been able to concoct a magical love potion that would sexually attract the bull. In order to fulfill her desire, she needs the help of a male master engineer. In Greek philosophical terminology, this ability to produce potentially eternally lasting objects (like tables) is called "poetic." Daedalus is thus pursuing an activity that he shares with the poets. Indeed Daedalus' prop is a powerfully poetic cow, and the image he created has the power to evoke a series of (brutally violent) images which are *not* the image: they are quite literally "in" the image. The dummy cow (with its dark inside where the male imagination can pursue its most graphic phantasies of penetration) is a model for the associative processes at work in the art of memory—but it is in itself not an *imago agens*. In marked contrast to Ovid's version of the story, where Pasiphaë is disguised in a dummy cow, Della Porta apparently wishes his readers

to create an *imago agens* in which a prostitute has sexual intercourse with a bull without recourse to Daedalus' prop.

Pasiphaë's myth points to the idea that the birth of monsters, in this case the Minotaur, requires the intervention of a male mastermind, who not only helps to beget the deviant creature, but also provides the means to contain the dangers arising from it, for it is Daedalus who constructs the famous maze in which Pasiphaë's child is imprisoned.⁴⁸ This image of Daedalus as creator and container of monsters or marvels epitomizes the role Della Porta wished to assign to himself as a cunning *magus*.⁴⁹ Here, at the crossroads between mechanical device and intervention into the organic body, Della Porta's particular form of late Renaissance natural magic, physiognomy, and the theater unfolds.

Actually, the *imago agens* of a woman having sex with a bull has an interesting relationship to Della Porta's *Magia naturalis*. Here we learn of Della Porta's keen interest in practices of cross-breeding between human beings and animals. To bolster his claims, he cites the usual suspects for such stories: Pliny, Herodotus, Strabo and their tales of women who were raped by billy goats, producing monstrous offspring.⁵⁰ This leads him to believe that "some of the Indians have usual company with bruit beasts; and that which is so generated, is half a beast, and half a man" (*Magick* 2, 12, 43). Della Porta also contends that it would be possible for a man to inseminate a fowl under the right astrological constellation and the right medical complexion.⁵¹ In order to create a human/animal monster, Della Porta does not resort to the kind of contraption Daedalus constructed for Pasiphaë, but relies instead on his expertise in measuring, not the proportions of the head as did Alberti, but rather the lengths and depths of male and female sexual organs, the course of the stars, and the assessment of the medical complexions inscribed in the physical traits of human beings and celestial bodies alike. These parameters—basically a doctrine of signatures—are also the most decisive indicators in Della Porta's texts on physiognomonics, where he postulates the close resemblance of human beings to certain animals, with attendant implications for the human character.⁵²

Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*

This impression is confirmed by looking at another *imago agens* where a woman has sex with an animal. In both the Italian and Latin versions of *The Art of Remembering*, Della Porta claims that we remember the woman having intercourse with the ass from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* better than we do the heroism of a Muzius Scevola.⁵³ Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, the second-century novel better known as *The Golden Ass*, is an interesting source for *The Art of Remembering*, because Apuleius describes the sexual act between an ass (not a bull) and a woman in great detail.⁵⁴ Lucius, the protagonist of *The Golden Ass*, is a young man obsessed by witchcraft who is transformed into an ass after he applied the magical unguent concocted by Pamphile, a powerful Thessalian witch. In the shape of an ass—although never losing consciousness that he is a man—Lucius lives

through a veritable odyssey during which he is beaten and mistreated. When one of his many keepers discovers that this ass is particularly clever, he makes Lucius the object of special exhibitions and a rich woman falls in love with the ass and hires it. In contrast to *Pasiphaë*, this woman has sex with the animal without any recourse to a prop. Both Lucius and the woman seem to enjoy the act, in spite of his asinine and—hence proverbially large—sexual organ. This changes as soon as Lucius has to perform the act again, this time as a cruel public entertainment in an amphitheater, where a female convict, before being devoured by wild beasts, is sentenced to have intercourse with the ass. Lucius deeply resents this act and manages to escape.⁵⁵

It is interesting to note that Apuleius explicitly links his salacious story of the wealthy woman who has sex with the ass to the myth *Pasiphaë*, given he calls the woman *asinaria Pasiphaë* (an ass-like *Pasiphaë*).⁵⁶ The story is thus marked as a parody of the myth of *Pasiphaë* in the form of a blunt satire on late Roman mores. Upon closer scrutiny, this story of the noblewoman and the ass is—again structured by a set of inversions, an oblique evocation of the myths of the rape of Europa as well as of *Pasiphaë*. In Apuleius it is a man, Lucius, who has been turned into the shape of an ass—neither a god (Jupiter) who willfully changes his shape into a bull (as in the Europa myth), nor a witch (*Pasiphaë*) who desires a real bull and who needs the help of a male engineer to fulfill her desire. Instead, Lucius is a man who has been changed into an animal, not by a *Pasiphaë* (who was incapable of doing that job for herself) but by another relative or follower of Circe—Pamphile. The sexualized content with a specific violence towards female bodies is deeply inscribed into the story of Apuleius and, consequently, in the *imago agens* prescribed in Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*, which again condenses the stories of *Pasiphaë* (the prostitute has sex with a bull) and the story of the sodomite noblewoman in Apuleius, as well as including the plan to showcase the act with female convict.

The extremity of this *imago agens* is enhanced by the fact that such acts of bestiality were a capital crime in Della Porta's time, primarily because they were believed to engender monstrous offspring, to humanize the animal world, and simultaneously to animalize the human perpetrators.⁵⁷

Io: more cows

Another myth Della Porta mentions in his *The Art of Remembering*—this time, as an *imago agens* for remembering the word “horns”—is the story of Io.⁵⁸ Her story is most pertinent because it concerns a beautiful Naiad who is raped by Jupiter and subsequently transformed into what Ovid describes as an extremely beautiful cow. In this shape, Jupiter wishes to protect the girl he has violated from the wrath of his ever-jealous wife. Unexpectedly, however, Juno likes the animal and receives it as Jupiter's gift. Suspecting some ruse from her husband, she proceeds to have the animal protected by Argos, the moment in the story Della Porta employs as *imago agens*. According to Ovid, Io did not lose consciousness of her

real identity but, rather, terrified by her transformation, she seeks the company of her (human) family. Io's father suspects that the tame, suspiciously human cow is his daughter. He exclaims in desperation that he had been "preparing and arranging a marriage (thamos taedasque praeparam I, v 558), hoping for a son-in-law . . . now you must have a bull from the herd for husband, and your children will be cattle (de grege nunc tibi vir, nunc de grege natus habendus. v.660)." Eventually, Juno discovers Io's true identity, her wrath subsides, and Io is fully restored to her former human shape. Similar to Apuleius' story of Lucius in his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes Io's transformations from human being into cow and back again in great detail.⁵⁹

Io's story is constructed as a set of inversions of the story of Europa. Jupiter approaches Io in the form of a human being (not as a handsome bull) and he transforms not his own body but that of the maid into the shape of a beautiful cow, a body in which the sexually abused girl is deeply unhappy. However, the affinities between Lucius and Io are even more striking; their stories appear as mirrored inversions along the gender divide. Both their bodies are transformed into the shapes of animals (a cow viz. an ass), both are beautiful and attractive in that guise (Juno unexpectedly takes a liking to the cow, the noblewoman has sex with Lucius), neither of them lose consciousness of their human nature and suffer in their shape as animals (but Io seeks the company of her father, whereas Lucius wants his girlfriend back), both are subsequently transformed into human shape again, and both were originally transformed in order to escape imminent persecution. (Io is turned into a cow by Jupiter in order to protect her from Juno's wrath, Lucius is mistakenly transformed into an ass in order to escape from the law.)

The specific aspect making the stories of Europa, Io, Pasiphaë, and Lucius so significant for Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering* is the constant interplay of various but related *inversions* of plots. Indeed, this method is intrinsic to the modes of transformation prescribed by this particular art.⁶⁰ Interchangeability arises from the set of oblique inter-textual references and inversions of plots, as amalgamated in a given *imago agens*.⁶¹ In the mode of synecdoche, an *imago agens* is designed to represent an entire story in one image. This is a constitutive strategy of Della Porta's mnemotechnique, which aims at the thematic interconnecting of persona/locus, *imago agens*, and memorandum. For example, a prostitute Della Porta has slept with (persona/locus) in turn embodies Leda having sex with Jupiter (*imago agens*) in order to remember the word bird (memorandum). Della Porta's personal (phallic) imagination thus becomes entwined with classical myth.

Within the positional logic of loci/personae in Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*, therefore, Leda, Io, Europa, Pasiphaë, the Roman noblewoman, and the female convict all become different *imagines agentes* into which one and the same memorandum may be inscribed. Thus, the porous boundaries between human beings and animals integral to Della Porta's *imagines agentes* not only indicate his personal taste for a bizarre and grotesque imaginary and his studies

in physiognomy; they embody the basic principles of the Renaissance natural magic tradition of which Della Porta was a late (yet influential) exponent. It allows for a "syn-opsis," a viewing together of very different stories that bolsters one of the foundational tenets of Renaissance natural magic: the universal drive for wholeness permeating the entire enlivened and sexualized cosmos, where the male and female aspects strive to unite. By dint of his profound knowledge of the occult sympathies and antipathies between things, the natural magus has the power to tap and organize these cosmic erotic forces so that he may produce his marvels.⁶² Within this Renaissance tradition, the human imagination has not only a specific capacity of the soul for evoking and then transforming images that originate from sensory perception. The human imagination also had the power to shape the body it inhabited, as well as other bodies.

The formative power of maternal longings

Renaissance natural magic coopted an ancient belief in order to exemplify the extraordinary formative powers of the human imagination. If a woman was exposed to a strong sensation or harbored an intense longing during intercourse or pregnancy, this state was thought to influence the formation of the embryo in her womb. Renaissance magi thus believed that the image of its mother's obsession was impressed on the fetus and the future child would physically resemble the entity she had longed for during intercourse. Della Porta makes direct reference to such ideas and related practices. Initially, it appears that he is simply repeating the highly popular theories on maternal longings encountered in authors as diverse as Ficino and Castiglione.⁶³ In the circular reasoning characteristic of natural magic, this set of beliefs about the imagination also opened implications for purposefully shaping future children, by positively conditioning the imagination of the mother. A frequently repeated *segreto* for creating beautiful children recommends exposing women during intercourse and pregnancy to paintings or sculptures of beautiful children, influencing the future child's shape via beautiful *imaginamenta*.⁶⁴ Della Porta refers directly to this bedchamber practice:

place in the bed-chambers of great men, the images of *Cupid*, *Adonis*, and *Ganymedes*; or else [. . .] set them there in carved and graven works in some solid matter, [. . .] whereby it may come to passe, that whensoever their wives lie with them, still they may think upon those pictures, and have their imagination strongly and earnestly bent thereupon: and not only while they are in the act, but after they have conceived and quickened also: so shall the child when it is born, imitate and expresse in the same form which his mother conceived in her mind, when she conceived him, and bare in her mind, which she bare him in her wombe.⁶⁵

It is fascinating that Della Porta's two discourses on memory and on what one could call family planning are also interconnected through his choice of visual

examples, of *imagines agentes*. As in *The Art of Remembering*, we again encounter the images of Adonis and Ganymede and of Cupid. Significantly, in contrast to Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*, where predominately female personae cater to male sexual fantasies, all of the images that *Magia naturalis* prescribes for pregnant women are of beautiful boys.

Della Porta's ideas on the power of maternal longings entail a creative female capacity to produce such images in the shape of children; her imagination is engaged with the future. A master of the art of memory, on the other hand, is engaged in recollecting the past. Hence, the process in the pregnant woman's imagination constitutes an inversion of the process prescribed in Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*: the woman's imagination allows a marble statue to come alive, whereas the (male) master of the art of memory seeks to freeze the image of a living person (preferably a sexualized woman) into an *imago agens*—that is, he turns the figment to stone, symbolically killing the persona just when it appears to be most alive.

This excursion into beliefs about the effects of maternal longings allows us to re-contextualize the mental process structuring Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*. The imagination is a faculty of the human soul capable of producing loci and *imagines agentes*, to be frozen into statues, into *tableaux vivants*. The story of the maternal longings confirms Della Porta's creed that the human imagination can also *materialize* its products; in both cases, the image may be unfrozen and directed back to its starting position to assume a new pose. The master of Della Porta's art of memory thus arrogates for himself a phantasmatic power over life and death, inherently a much greater power than the pro-creative capacity he has ascribed to women. The asymmetric gender bias that emerges in this account is instructive. As in the story of Daedalus and Pasiphaë, the art of memory also refers to the preeminent ability of the male magus to create monsters through artificial cross-breeding, whereas the imagination of a pregnant woman requires male protection and guidance to its power to shape future children.

Conclusion

The evidence for my claim that Porta's choice of memory images in his *The Art of Remembering* is not arbitrary, but instead it is closely related to the overreaching project he pursued as author of texts on (and a practitioner of) natural magic, physiognomy, and the theater. A set of classical myths—*Andromeda*, *Europa*, *Io*, *Pasiphaë*, and *Aktaion*—handed down by Ovid, parodied by Apuleius, and painted by Titian, was put to a specific use in Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*. In the mode of synecdoche, he instructs the reader on how to reduce an entire story to a single *imago agens* (for instance, the image of naked Andromeda chained to her rock). The *imago agens* thus functions as a synopsis of the entire myth. This oscillation between the modes of synopsis and of synecdoche—entailing a constant process of re-focalization—in effect constitutes the basic cognitive operation in Della Porta's *The Art of Remembering*. Since it reduces a whole welter of ancient

myths to one common narrative, the mode of synecdoche facilitates the perception of thematic or structural affinities between different myths. Accordingly, a series of *imagines agentes* referring to very heterogeneous stories allows a leveling in our perception of these different narratives and their content. The mode of synecdoche is conducive to focalization on a single topic via myriad topical affinities (which become highlighted in the mode of synopsis). In Della Porta's mnemotechnique, this re-focalization of a series of stories may transpire not only through a heightening affinity, but also in the mode of inversion (for instance, in the myths of Europa and Pasiphaë). In *The Art of Remembering*, this results in the reduction of the stories of Io, Pasiphaë, and Europa (as well as Apuleius' *asinaria Pasiphaë*) to the topic of women having sex with animals and generating monstrous offspring (bulls, cows, asses). This topical affinity is also pertinent to the relationship between sexualized *imagines agentes* and memoranda (bulls, horns, birds).

The *imagines agentes* operate within the imagination of the master of the art of memory. This particular mental faculty not only receives such images; it also has the capacity to transform them into new images—images which in turn have the power for transforming the human body. Not only does Della Porta's laboratory of monstrous hybridization constitute a hotbed for the literary imaginary, but the literary image also models the reader's imagination, and once the imagination is infected by an image, these images may acquire a life of their own. This reasoning has its ultimate proof in the belief that a pregnant woman's fantasies influence the form of the future child. At the thematic intersections of literature, visual art, physiognomonics, natural magic, the core topic—sex with animals and the generation of monstrous offspring—becomes embedded (in the literal sense of the word) with personal erotic experiences. The women who have intercourse with animals are impersonated by the women with whom Della Porta has had—or wished to have—intercourse. As mnemonic personae/loci and hence as slaves of his erotic fantasy, they are forced to embody any role assigned to them by their master. Della Porta is thus obliquely portraying himself in the process of recollecting his own memories—living statues of women who have sex with animals who may be seen as surrogates for him. In a series of constant *mise en abîmes* mirroring a phallic erotic imagination, Della Porta points his readers (and himself) towards the center of a truly mannerist Minotaur's abode.

Notes

I wish to thank Marlen Bidwell-Steiner for many invaluable discussions and comments.

- 1 On the art of memory, see Yates, *The Art of Memory*; Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*; Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*.
- 2 The Latin *Ars reminiscendi* was published 1602. *L'arte del ricordare* was purported to be the Italian translation by a Dorandino Falcone da Gioia, but this was in all probability a pseudonym for the author himself. Both texts are edited in Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi: L'arte di ricordare*. For the first English translation of the Italian version and a well-informed introduction to the text in English, see Della Porta, *The Art of Remembering/L'arte del ricordare*. On the differences between the Italian and the Latin versions, see in that edition

- Baum, "Writing Classical Authority"; also Bolzoni, "Retorica, teatro, iconologia, 340, with footnote 5; Maggi, "Introduction," in Della Porta, *The Art of Remembering/L'arte del ricordare*, 29–30; Balbiani on the *fortuna* of Della Porta's *Magia naturalis* in *La Magia naturalis*.
- 3 Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, 175.
 - 4 Valente, "Della Porta e l'inquisizione."
 - 5 On which see Kodera "Giambattista della Porta," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
 - 6 For a succinct and highly influential discussion of the medieval technique of the art, see *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, ed. and trans. Nüsslein, 164–80 (bk III, §§ 28–40, XVI–XXIV); Yates, *The Art of Memory*, 63–113.
 - 7 On the medieval use of memory images, Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 59, writes: "Most importantly, it is 'affective' in nature, that is, it is sensorily derived and emotionally charged." See also *ibid.*, 109, 134, and 137.
 - 8 Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, 130–31.
 - 9 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 75.
 - 10 See for instance Dolce, *Dialogo del modo*, 26–32.
 - 11 As Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, p. 137 (with footnote 12) has pointed out, it is interesting to note that the *Ars reminiscendi* explicitly warns against the use of medicines or drugs for enhancing the capacitances of memory, whereas in Della Porta had presented such recipes in his *Magia naturalis*.
 - 12 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 68. On the notion of *phantasmata* in Della Porta, see Kodera, "Giovann Battista della Porta's Imagination."
 - 13 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 70.
 - 14 See Dolce, *Dialogo del modo*, 92 and the attendant notes directing the reader to medieval sources of this method.
 - 15 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 70.
 - 16 Dolce, *Dialogo del modo*, 33–34, for example, does not try to assimilate the personae to the loci, but instead distinguishes between them.
 - 17 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 17. It is interesting to note that Della Porta does not seem to be picky about terminology, as for him very different notions—*similitudo*, *idea*, *forma*, *simulacrum* are synonyms with *imago*.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, 79. Galileo loved exactly such character traits in Ariosto's heroes; cf. Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, 211.
 - 19 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 17–18. Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, 167 has pointed to the fact that Della Porta is here quoting almost verbatim from Leon Battista Alberti's, *De pictura*, 2. 40, arguing that "the theatrical tradition becomes a point of reference to the painter who has to paint an *istoria*." For a discussion of the number of loci from a different contemporary perspective see Dolce, *Dialogo del modo*, 39–43 with many references to earlier sources.
 - 20 Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, 162–63; Dolce, *Dialogo del modo*, 145, footnote 345 with much scholarly literature on the connections between the art of memory and theater.
 - 21 Kodera, "Bestiality and Gluttony."
 - 22 Clubb, "Theatregrams," has called these variable parts theatergrams.
 - 23 One possibility is to generate a locus which is then invariably used, because it is recharged with new imagines that have the capacity to store a new set of memoranda. Yet if this process of re-inscription of the extant structure proves impossible, one must destroy the entire setup. In order to do this, many masters of memory suggested methods that were outright iconoclastic; cf. Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, 142–44.
 - 24 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 18.
 - 25 *Ibid.*
 - 26 Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 131 on the pictorial turn of medieval art of memory.
 - 27 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 76.
 - 28 *Ibid.*
 - 29 *Ibid.*, 17–18.

- 30 This otherwise puzzling *imago* seems to be a remnant from a manuscript version of the *Arte del ricordare*, which refers as examples for *imagines agentes* to one of Boccaccio's *Novellae*, on Chichibio, of the Decameron VI, 4 (Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 77); in that version Della Porta also mentions two more highly salacious stories from the *Decameron* (III, 10 and VIII, 7); see Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 79 and 95; see also Baum, "Writing Classical Authority," 159.
- 31 The hero Hercules and the river god Achelous were fighting over Deianeira, the daughter of Dionysius. During the battle between the two rivals, the bull-headed river god turned first into a snake and then into a bull, whose right horn is broken by Hercules; according to one version, Hercules took that horn down to Tartarus where it was filled by the Hesperides with golden fruit and is now called Bona Dea (cornucopia). Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 553–54; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk. IX, vv. 1–92. Observe that the cornucopia appears in the next *imago agens*.
- 32 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 18.
- 33 This increasing prurience is a general tendency in Della Porta's works and is probably due to the increasingly intolerant intellectual climate characterizing the last decades of the sixteenth century; on this see Kodera, "Bestiality and Gluttony," 86–87 with references.
- 34 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 77.
- 35 Della Porta here had openly referred to the myth, whereas in the *Ars reminiscendi* he only alluded to it—namely, by describing the iconography of one of Titian's most famous paintings (the persona of a virgin sitting and playing on a bull and holding a crown over the animal's head).
- 36 In the Latin version the prostitute was substituted with the lover of one's wife. In the Latin version, *ibid.*, 22, Leda is completely omitted.
- 37 The word *ucello* (bird) denotes penis, with birds commonly looming large in all kinds of erotic metaphors; on the semantics of *ucellare* (the word denoting prostitution, ridicule, and penis) see Alberti, "Giove ucellato," 59–64; for similar contexts in Della Porta's theater, see Kodera, "Humans as Animals," 108–09.
- 38 Compare Schiesari, *Beasts and Beauties*, 61–64 for perceptive remarks on the gender bias of Della Porta's Physiognomy.
- 39 Alberti, *Della pittura*, 122–24 (bk 2, §36) For a discussion of the relevant passages, see for instance Heffernan, *Cultivating Picturacy*, 71–73.
- 40 Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory*, 167.
- 41 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IV, vv 671–675; 112.
- 42 Apuleius, *Metamorphoses: The Golden Ass*, Book ii, § 1, 22.
- 43 See Innes, "Introduction," 19–24.
- 44 So does Dolce, *Dialogo del modo*, 146–47, mentioning Titian's Europa and Akataion.
- 45 Ovid, *Ars amatoria libri tres*, 26–28, bk. I, v. 289–326, Ovid., *Metamorphoses*, bk. VIII, v. 134–36; Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 293–94.
- 46 On Europa, see *ibid.*, 194–97.
- 47 A caricature of the animation of statues by Egyptian magi, as described by Hermes in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, an account which it is well known, and haunted many renaissance minds; for a commented edition, Copenhagen, *Hermetica*.
- 48 A labyrinth, i.e., an architectural structure designed expressly to get lost in, as opposed to orderly architectural structures—and also the inversion of the clearly represented structure of loci in the art of memory.
- 49 See Kodera, *Disreputable Bodies*, 275–93 and Della Porta, *De i miracoli*, 23–25, bk I, ch. 9.
- 50 Della Porta, *Natural magick*, 43, bk 2, ch. 12.
- 51 Kodera, "Humans as Animals," 109–15; Della Porta, *Magia naturalis libri XX*, 76, bk II, ch. 12. This passage is an elaboration of Aristotle on crossbreeding, from *De generatione animalium* 4.3, 769b. In this case Della Porta's credulity is greater than that of many of his educated contemporaries, who were usually more skeptical about the possibility of producing offspring through sex between humans and animals. For a very interesting

- contemporary discussion of the topic, which clearly accentuates the ways in which Della Porta is bending his evidence, see Varchi, "Della generazione dei Mostri," 99–106.
- 52 On this see MacDonald, "Humanistic Self-Representation," Kodera, *Disreputable Bodies*, and Schiesari, *Beasts and Beauties*.
- 53 Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 78–79. Cf. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* lib. X, §§ 19–22.
- 54 For a succinct introduction to that text, and relevant secondary literature, see Kenney in Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, ix–xli.
- 55 Ibid., 84–186; 190–94, bk 10, § 19–23; § 29–35.
- 56 Apuleius, *Metamorphoseon*, bk. 10, § 19, l. 3.
- 57 See Liliequist, "Peasants against Nature," 408. On the increasing belief in the real existence of such hybrid animals in the later Middle Ages, see Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 139 and 147.
- 58 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk I, vv. 588–662 and 724–45, Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 190–92.
- 59 Just see the example of the re-transformation: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, bk I, vv 737–46, trans. Mary M. Innes, 48. For Lucius' transformations into an ass and back again, see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 52, bk 3, § 25 and ibid., 202–03, bk 11, § 13–14.
- 60 In that vein of thought, many more things could be said also on the story of Hercules and the bull-headed river god Achelous (on whom, see above, endnote 31).
- 61 The *Arte del ricordare* mentions not only association from the same (*dal simile*, Della Porta, *Ars Reminiscendi*, 80 and 81) but also *aggiungere, mancare, trasportare, mutare, partire* (ibid., 85) and *trasponimento dal contrario* (ibid., 95).
- 62 Kodera, "Giambattista della Porta," 8–9 for a short introduction to the idea that all things in the universal hierarchy of being are moved by the (irrational) forces of attraction and repulsion they feel for one another. Porta provides an impressive description of the macrocosmic animal, the male and female aspects of which mingle in a harmonious and well-coordinated way; cf. Della Porta, *Magia naturalis*, bk. 1, ch. 9.
- 63 Della Porta, *Natural magick*, 51: "Many children have hare-lips; and all because their mothers being with child, did look upon a hare." For an earlier source see Ficino, *De amore*, 252.
- 64 For an introduction to the history of these seemingly widespread practices and the related artwork during the Renaissance, see Jacqueline Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth*, 128–39.
- 65 Della Porta, *Natural magick*, 53.

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13

“O MIE ARTI FALLACI”

Tasso’s saintly women in the *Liberata* and *Conquistata*

Jane Tylus

The second half of Torquato Tasso’s tormented life was taken up by his epic poem *Gerusalemme liberata* and the painstaking revisions he made to it following its unauthorized publication in 1581. Posterity has canonized the 1581 poem rather than its more sprawling successor, *Gerusalemme conquistata*, which Tasso proudly dedicated to Pope Clement VIII’s nephew when he published it in 1593. Posterity notwithstanding, Tasso claimed that his “poema riformato” was far superior to the earlier work largely because of “the much more certain knowledge I now have of myself as well as of my writings” (“la certa cognizione ch’io ho di me stesso e de le mie cose”).¹

One result of this new certainty seems to have been if not the eradication of the *Liberata*’s female characters, at least the curtailing of their influence.² The enchantress Armida virtually disappears after Canto 13, lamenting her failures to keep the Christian army’s strongest knight with her forever, and no longer converting to Christianity as in the surprising end of the *Liberata*. The princess of Antioch, Erminia, is denied her remarkable role in the *Liberata* as the discoverer and healer of the Christian knight Tancredi’s wounded body and the revealer of a secret plot against his captain, Goffredo. Two extraordinary Christian women are completely excised from the *Conquistata*: Gildippe, who dies fighting by her husband’s side in the *Liberata*’s twentieth canto, and Sofronia, who offered her life to save the Christian refugee community in a captive Jerusalem, and who, in turn, is saved by the Muslims’ most celebrated woman warrior, Clorinda. Only Clorinda’s tale is relatively untouched—with the exception of her rescue of Sofronia. Both the *Liberata* and the *Conquistata* tell of her strident independence and her baptism into her mother’s Christian faith as she lies dying by the hand of Tancredi, who has killed what he loved.

This essay will not so much catalogue the *Conquistata*’s many revisions as attempt to gauge the changing role of the female body in Tasso’s epic practice

and its relationship to Tasso's growing ambivalence about the status of the "arti fallaci" in his poetry—a phrase, as we will see, that is uttered by the much altered character of Erminia toward the end of the *Conquistata*. And even if Clorinda and Armida continue to stand out in their memorable particularity in the *Conquistata*, they are joined by a new host of women who exist largely to create a "dynamic that is reassuringly familial," as Claudio Gigante has observed, and who no longer possess the self-conscious artfulness that characterized female characters in the *Liberata*.³ The contrast allows us to see how potentially radical the Tasso of the *Liberata* was and at the same time how his transformations of women in the *Conquistata* are tied to his reconceptualization of himself as an epic poet.⁴

I will elaborate some of these arguments by turning to developments that led to the *Conquistata*, necessarily addressing selective incidents within both poems in order to depict the nature of Tasso's poetic transformation. One episode in particular offers itself up for special consideration. It concerns a female figure in the *Liberata* who has not attracted much attention, and who, as mentioned above, is nowhere to be found in the revised poem: Sofronia.⁵ Willing to die in exchange for the salvation of her fellow Christians, she is rescued and subsequently exiled from Jerusalem. The contrast between this stirring episode in the *Liberata* and its muted aftermath in the *Conquistata* could not be greater, as the following pages will show. At the same time, they attest to what might be called Tasso's desire for the organicity of his revised epic, a poem in which individual characters would be immune from the criticism launched against Sofronia herself. For according to the *Gerusalemme*'s first readers, the episode that centered on her in Canto 2 was "poco connesso" to the *Liberata* as a whole.⁶ This lack of continuity, in turn, has a stylistic echo in the infamous critique of Tasso's language as "parlar disgiunto" or disjointed speech—a disjointedness even Tasso acknowledged when he claimed to have learned it from Virgil, admitting that it can tempt one to swerve dangerously from the "truth" in its pursuit of fallacious artistries.⁷ The path toward wholeness in the *Conquistata* thus marks a turn away from Virgil and toward the more narratively fluid Homer, as readers of Tasso (and Tasso himself) have readily ascertained.⁸ But this path also goes through the body of the *female*, inscripted into the *Conquistata* as bearer of a new epic model of integration and personal loss. It is a body that the chastened Tasso, in his final critical writings on his poetic output, may also have recognized as his own.

In the early 1680s, the prolific Luca Giordano executed a series of paintings for a Genovese palazzo recently acquired by the nobleman Eugenio Durazzo. Among the works Giordano designed for the entryway into a palace that was on the "must-see" list of every foreign visitor to Genova, were portraits of the death of Seneca and the Greek hero Perseus. But his paintings also featured a large canvas depicting an event from the *Liberata*'s story of Sofronia, the brave young woman who volunteers to die for her fellow Christians and who, along with the man who loves her, is saved by Clorinda. Moved by the taciturn stance of the

female victim before her, Clorinda asks Aladino, Jerusalem's king, to free the two Christians in exchange for her promise that she will perform great deeds in Jerusalem's defense, and Giordano chooses to display this moment in his work⁹ (Figure 13.1).¹⁰ At the same time, Clorinda's back is turned, so that the real savior of the two Christians bound at the stake seems to be a painting of Mary which angels are holding aloft—suggesting that Giordano's work may also be about the salvific powers of art.

Mariella Utili has written of Giordano's intent to throw into relief the religious aspect of the story: "the exaltation of Christianity, which had been the basis for the immediate success of Tasso's poem and which many other artists before Giordano had noted as well."¹¹ Yet with respect to the episode of Sofronia and her would-be lover Olindo, who begs to die with her, such a remark might seem ironic. For this story provoked almost more than anything else in the epic the concerns of the poem's Inquisitorial readers, and in turn Tasso's worries about



FIGURE 13.1 Luca Giordano, "*Olindo e Sofronia*," Palazzo Reale gia' Durazzo (Genova).

Photo credit: Zeri Photo Archive, Bologna, inv. 110885.

the extent to which its inclusion would threaten the *Liberata's* publication. So much so, that in a telling letter written on April 3, 1576 to his friend and literary confidant Scipione Gonzaga he writes, "Io ho già condannato con irrevocabil sentenza alla morte l'episodio di Sofronia" ("I've already condemned the episode of Sofronia to death, and my decree is absolute").¹² Having barely escaped death at the hands of Jerusalem's king, Sofronia was condemned anew by Tasso.

The reasons for this condemnation are several, even as the episode contains within itself a germ of the process that will define Tasso's method in the *Conquistata*. One reason certainly has to do with the painting which Giordano has floating in the sky—a touch unaccounted for in the *Liberata* itself, but prepared for by the odd narrative Tasso weaves in the opening of Canto 2. For the catalyst that set off a tyrant's rage, leading him to sentence Jerusalem's Christians to death, is indeed a work of art: an image of Mary taken from the Christians' church by the magician and former Christian Ismeno, who is convinced of its supernatural abilities to protect the walls of the city against the Crusaders. He places Mary's picture in a mosque so as to provide "fatal custodia a queste porte."¹³ For reasons on which Tasso coyly refuses to pronounce—"O fu di man fedele opra furtiva, / o pur il Ciel qui sua potenza adopra, / che di Colei ch'è sua regina e diva / sdegna che loco vil l'imagin copra: / ch'incerta fama è ancor se ciò ascriva / ad arte umana od a mirabil opra"; "It was either the work of a stealthy hand, or heaven interposed its potent will, disdaining that the image of its queen be smuggled somewhere so contemptible" [2: 9]¹⁴)—the *immagine* mysteriously disappears from the mosque into which Ismeno has smuggled it. Certain that the Christians have contrived to steal it back, Aladino plots for them universal slaughter, until the beautiful Sofronia steps forward to take the blame so that her people will not die, a confession the narrator describes as a "magnanima menzogna," a magnanimous lie. In a letter, however, written soon after he released the poem to an official reading, Tasso seems fearful that the stolen *immagine* has invoked the ire not of Aladino but of Silvio Antoniano, the Roman Inquisitor and official in charge of granting the right of *nihil obstat* for books published in Rome. Writing to Luca Scalabrino on a later occasion, he continued to insist on excising the "episodio di Sofronia": "perch'io non vorrei dar occasione a i frati con quella imagine, o con alcune altre cosette che sono in quell'episodio, di proibire il libro" ("I don't want to give the friars a chance to condemn the book because of that image, or because of any other little things found in the episode").¹⁵

Much of interest has been written of the status of images in the aftermath of Trent, some of it in regard to the poem's second canto. As Naomi Yavneh has pointed out, Trent was preoccupied with limiting the role that excessive popular devotion played in religious life, and its stance on images was no exception: it perforce needed to clarify the extent to which "immagini" were only the *simulacri* for the things to which they pointed. As such, the importance of an object in referencing beyond itself—its deictic function—was accentuated by the orthodox proclamations from the 1570s and 1580s. One typical characterization of the post-Tridentine image, although from the Seicento, is offered by the Jesuit

Giovanni Domenico Ottonelli. He suggests that in gazing at a painting, "which represents something other than the thing which it resembles, and from which it takes its name" ("che rappresenta un'altra cosa, di cui tiene la simiglianza, e prende il nome"), one must recognize that "while the image renders visible what is invisible, the image is only worthy of honor by virtue of *resemblance*, not *substance*."¹⁶ Moreover, as Yavneh goes on to point out, in the episode from Tasso's *Liberata*, the transformation of the painting of Mary into a thing of "substance"—i.e., it alone can save Jerusalem from harm—is initiated by the renegade Christian, Ismeno, unable to leave his former religion completely behind him ("Questi or Macone adora, e fu cristiano, / ma i primi riti anco lasciar non pote; / anzi, in uso empio e profano / confonde le due leggi a se' mal note"; "He adores Mohammed, as once he adored Christ, but cannot now abandon the first way, so often to profane and evil use confounds the two religions out of ignorance" [2: 2]). It is Ismeno who recommends that Aladino place "questa effigie lor" of Mary, "diva e madre" or goddess and mother of the Christian's god (2: 5) into the mosque because of its talismanic status—an idolatrous reading in which the Christians, who leave their offerings before the "simulacro" do not, apparently, concur.¹⁷

One can only speculate as to what about the "immagine" in Canto 2 might have angered Tasso's inquisitorial reader; the letter from Antoniano detailing his objections to the *Liberata* does not survive. But it is striking that another *vergine*, Sofronia, proclaims for herself the protective status Ismeno gave to the *immagine* of Maria. Her sacrifice thus effects a substitution originally engineered by the apostate. She too adopts the language of female uniqueness when boldly stating to the king Aladino her "crime": "sol di me stessa, sol consigliera, sol essecutrice" ("I was the only one [who knew of it], one counselor, one executor alone"; 2: 23). When Olindo challenges Sofronia's magnanimous lie, arguing that a mere woman would be unable to carry out the theft, she insists again on her autonomy: "Ho petto anch'io, ch'ad una morte crede / di bastar solo, e compagnia non chiede" ("I too have a heart, confident it can die but once. It does not ask for company"; 2: 30). But Tasso links her in other ways to the Madonna that Ismeno made into a singularly potent object. As commentators have noticed, Tasso compares her to the stolen image when her veil and mantle are roughly taken from her when she is led to the stake.¹⁸ Just as Mary's image, "enveloped in a slender shroud" ("in un velo avvolto"; 2: 5) was seized ("rapito") by Ismeno, so are Sofronia's veil and mantle seized from her ("rapit[i] a lei [Sofronia] il velo e 'l casto manto"; 2: 26). And an allusion to Mary's face ("il volto di lei") returns with "smarrisce il bel volto in un colore / che non è pallidezza, ma candore" ("the lovely rose of [Sofronia's] face is lost in white which is not pallor, but a glowing light"; 2: 26).

And yet the resonances between Sofronia and an inimitable female figure do not end here. Giampiero Giampieri has noted that the white coloring of Sofronia at the stake is echoed eleven cantos later when Clorinda, the third *vergine* of the canto, dies at Tancredi's hands. This pale demeanor at death's arrival in turn has its haunting origins in the phrase accompanying the suicides of Virgil's

most prominent female character, Dido, and the historical figure on whom she is partially modelled, Cleopatra. These intertextual allusions thus trace an unsettling historical trajectory, insofar as far from being “vergini,” unlike their Tasian counterparts, both women are known for their sensuality and, in Dido’s case, unrequited passion. At the same time, Clorinda, like Sofronia, occupies the role enjoyed by Dido and Cleopatra before romantic liaisons led them astray. They are all the singular, female supports of their people. When Islam’s powerful woman warrior enters Jerusalem in Canto 2, Clorinda is defined as the self-sufficient savior of a people that Sofronia and—according to Ismeno—the *immagine* of Mary have been before her. In greeting Clorinda, Aladino bestows on her the signal distinction of the warrior who alone can protect the city (“non, s’essercito grande unito insieme / fosse in mio scampo, avrei più certa speme”: “though a whole host should come to rescue me, I would not hope with greater certainty”; 2: 47). Not only does he concede to her his scepter (“lo scettro”) but he adds, “legge sia quel che comandi” (“let the law be what you command”; 2: 48), an honor that prompts Clorinda to ask for her reward in advance: the release of the two Christians.¹⁹

Even as Clorinda will exact bloody penalties on the Christians who attack the city to which she pledges her protection, this fantasy of female potency that begins in Canto 2 will be eclipsed outside Jerusalem’s walls when Clorinda is killed by Tancredi:

Meanwhile they whispered of the bitter chance
 behind the city wall confusedly
 till finally they learned the truth. At once
 through the whole town the bad news made its way
 mingled with cries and womanly laments,
 as desperate as if the enemy
 had taken the town in battle and flew to raze
 houses and temples and set the ruins ablaze.

Confusamente si bisbiglia intanto
 del caso reo ne la rinchiusa terra.
 Poi s’accerta e divulga, e in ogni canto
 de la città smarrita il romor erra
 misto di gridi e di femineo pianto;
 non altramente che se presa in guerra
 tutta ruini, e ’l foco e i nemici empì
 volino per le case e per li tèmpi.

(12: 100)

The defeat of a city in wartime evoked in this moving simile is the fate that Ismeno believes Jerusalem will avoid if Mary’s image is placed in the mosque; that Sofronia believes her people will avoid if she dies at the stake; and that

Aladino believes his kingdom will avoid if Clorinda agrees to defend his city. And the moment, of course, looks backward again to Virgil, and to the demise of another city, Carthage, upon the death of another singular woman. "The palace rings with lamentations, with sobbing and women's shrieks, and heaven echoes with loud wails—even as though all Carthage or ancient Tyre were falling before the intruding foe, and fierce flames were rolling on over the roofs of men, over the roofs of gods" (IV: 667–71).²⁰ The "città smarrita," the *urbs* in ruin: in both *Aeneid* 4 and the *Liberata*, the figurative collapse of the city, portrayed in a simile that reveals the grim devastations of war, is tied to the death of a woman characterized as savior. And in both cases, the two cities of these respective poems will be invaded by the enemy—one during the Punic Wars that are only predicted in the *Aeneid*, the other in Canto 20 of the *Liberata*.

At the same time, the simile of Canto 12 following Clorinda's death can be said to silence the diabolical suggestion that women's bodies might be sufficient protection for Jerusalem's community; or in rhetorical terms, that the female body stands in an analogical relationship to the city and can procure its health. Sofronia's selfless action in Canto 2 procures temporary salvation for the Christians. But genuine salvation arrives only eighteen cantos later, when Goffredo's troops invade Jerusalem and secure it for its "rightful" owners. In the meantime, Sofronia, like the Madonna's image, has been withdrawn forever from the poem. Following her rescue by Clorinda, she does not refuse Olindo her hand in marriage, and with him and others "di forte corpo e di feroce ingegno" (whose bodies are robust and spirits bold; 2: 55) she is banished, so fearful is Aladino of having so much virtue nearby ("tanta virtù congiunta . . . vicina"; 2: 54). Some of the banished wandered aimlessly ("Molti n'andaro errando"; 2: 55) while others traveled to Emmaus where Goffredo's troops are gathered. Of Sofronia and Olindo, however, no more is heard. All Tasso divulges of their fate is that they both went into exile beyond the bounds of Palestine (2: 54). Such a finale to Sofronia's sacrificial offering ensures—intentionally, it would seem—that the episode is indeed "poco connesso" to the rest of the poem. Inserted into the beginning of the *Liberata*, the story of Sofronia operates as a virtually self-contained unit, ending with its main protagonist banished from Jerusalem. That the episode can be said to trace Tasso's ambivalences regarding "tanta virtù congiunta" in not one, but three, female characters, is suggested by both Sofronia's and the *immagine*'s summary dispatch from the poem—as though to insist on the heretical nature of Ismeno's view of the painting, and the women's views of themselves, as sufficient to protect a city.²¹

But there may be another link between the exiled women and the *immagine*. The latter is both more and less than an icon: it is a work of art, in ways which the woman themselves may replicate. Much of the threat represented by Sofronia has to do with her inscrutability, which mirrors the unknowability of the *immagine*'s fate and of the painting itself. Moved by generosity and "fortezza," Sofronia exits alone among the people ("tra 'l vulgo") after Aladino orders the Christians' houses burned. But as she journeys publicly to meet the king, Tasso

introduces some seemingly gratuitous phrases: she neither “covers up her beauty, nor displays it,” and “Non sai ben dir s’adorna o se negletta, / se caso od arte il bel volto compose” (“If chance or art has touched her lovely face, if she neglects or adorns herself, who knows”; 2: 18). Similarly, she is described in relationship to the young Olindo, who has loved her desperately from afar, as either “o lo sprezza, o no ‘l vede, o non s’avede” (“she scorns him, or does not see him, or takes no note”; 2: 16), and of her considerable beauty, she “non cura, / o tanto sol quant’onestà se ‘n fregi” (“cares not for it, or only as much as required by honor’s sake”; 2: 14). Even as Tasso depicts her as a “virgin of sublime and noble thoughts” (“vergine d’alti pensieri e regi”), he wastes no time in adding that she is also “d’alta beltà” (2: 14), suggesting that we do not know whether Sofronia is aware of her beauty’s effect on her admirers. In short, she is the product of an artfulness that at once belies her sincerity and renders her inaccessibility to public scrutiny even more pronounced.

Indeed, Sofronia is impugned throughout Canto 2 in various ways that can only force the reader to suspect if not her motive—which emerges following her struggle to balance masculine virility or “*fortezza*” and female modesty (“*vergogna*”)²²—then at least her self-presentation in a public space. And because she is a woman, “*amore*” emerges as the vehicle through which her integrity can be compromised. Or as Tasso says in introducing Olindo and in returning to the language used only several stanzas before of the chaste image of Mary and its supposed ability to provide “fatal custodia” to the gates of Jerusalem: “tu [amor] per mille custodie entro a i più casti/ verginei alberghi il guardo altrui portasti” (“although a thousand sentinels are placed, you [Love] lead men’s glances into the most chaste of dwellings”; 2: 15). The uncertain status of Sofronia’s agency and her inability to control the reception of her offer are highlighted again after the king, furious over her assertions that she was right to steal the image, orders her to be burned: “e ‘ndarno Amor contr’a lo sdegno crudo / di sua vaga bellezza a lei fa scudo” (“too slight a shield is womanly grace for Love to fling against the crude resentment of the king”; 2: 25): as though she—or Love working through her—might cunningly be able to soften the tyrant in his resolve. The manner in which Sofronia is tied to the stake—her veil and “*casto manto*” stripped violently from her and used to tie “*le molli braccia*” (2: 26)—and the ensuing appearance of Olindo beside her, “*tergo al tergo*,” heighten the barely suffused sensuality of the preceding stanzas in which Sofronia’s ambiguously constructed femininity has been a muted but persistent theme.

“O caso od arte.” This is the phrase that threatens to turn Sofronia into the seductress Armida, who appears two cantos later at the threshold of the Christians’ camp to lure the Crusaders away from war. Sofronia is no Armida. Yet in depicting Sofronia’s inner conflict between “*fortezza*” and “*vergogna*,” while refusing to declare the extent of Sofronia’s artful self-consciousness, Tasso highlights the problems that emerge when a woman thrusts herself into the public gaze.²³ The questioning presence of male spectators, a group into which Tasso inserts the (male) reader by way of the narrator’s interventions, ultimately points

to the inability of Sofronia—and by extension, of the *immagine* of Mary and of Clorinda, who has already unknowingly inspired the passion of the Christian knight Tancredi—to control the *effects* of her self-presentation. Like the Didos and Cleopatras before her, she is unable to escape from the controlling system of gender that makes her into the object gazed upon and fantasized about as though she were a work of art.

At the same time, what prevents Sofronia from becoming a martyr and hence giving her life for her people is another woman, Clorinda: who at first appears to the populous as a male warrior (“Ecco un guerriero [ché tal pare]”) but who is betrayed as a woman by her insignia, the tiger. When Clorinda enters into the crowded piazza where the two Christians are tied to the stake, she notes Olindo weeping “as a man weighed down with sorrow, not pain” (“in guisa d'uom cui preme / pietà, non doglia”) while Sofronia is silent, “con gli occhi al ciel si fisa / ch'anzi 'l morir par di qua giù divisa” (“her eyes so fixed on heaven that she seems to be leaving this world before she dies”; 2: 42). Clorinda's response to this sight—a Clorinda raised in the woods and led to disdain female pastimes such as sewing and embroidery—is extraordinary: “Clorinda intenerissi, e si condole / d'ambidue loro e lagrimonne alquanto” (“Clorinda's heart grew tender at this sight; she grieved with them, and tears welled up in her eyes”; 2: 43). Such tenderness leads her to ask for the two Christians as a gift in advance of her promised salvation of the city: a salvation, as we will soon know, she can never achieve. Her pity for a woman like herself—at once self-contained and yet vulnerable to others' fantasies about her sexuality—breaks through the religious and ethnic differences on which the *Liberata* as a whole depends, and arguably questions for Muslims and Christians alike the very premise of the war.

Clorinda will be revealed later in the poem as the daughter of a Christian mother, and in retrospect one might see her recognition of herself in Sofronia as a premonition of her true identity. Yet, at this early point in the poem, her alignment of herself with Sofronia, along with Tasso's allusions to Virgil's fateful women, creates a potentially scandalous community of women whose unpredictable and often unreadable actions threaten to undo the transcendental militarism on which the poem is based. The crisis of the *immagine*, in Ismeno's feverish recasting of its significance, is like that of the women who are endlessly substituted for it: complete within itself, it has no deictic function, failing to refer beyond itself to heavenly powers. Sofronia, too, points only to herself (“Sol essecutrice”), a presumed self-sufficiency that Tasso's narrator translates into inaccessibility. It creates for Sofronia the same unknowable status of the stolen painting, and an unknowability Clorinda can only admire, and in which she similarly partakes.

Tasso's simile of the city that dissolves into flames upon Clorinda's death ten cantos later is thus ultimately a *failed* simile. That he will go on to banish all of his Christian women from the end of the *Liberata* suggests both his attempt to contain the threat represented by the female figures of Canto 2 and his inability to integrate Christian and Muslim women alike into the culminating events of the poem. Clorinda and Gildippe are dead, Erminia is in an “albergo” somewhere

within the city, Armida utters words of conversion but only on Jerusalem's outskirts, and Sofronia has disappeared forever. To be sure, on the one hand, Tasso's poem generally refuses to allow any character to stand in *for* the whole and thus represent the city, earthly or celestial, by him or herself, as the belated "Allegoria del Poema" attests and as numerous episodes involving Rinaldo and Goffredo suggest.²⁴ In an early letter, Tasso protests the custom of romance that allows single characters to decide the fate of entire empires: "non ricevo affatto nel mio poema quell'eccesso di bravura che ricevono i romanzi; cioè, che alcuno sia tanto superiore a tutti gli altri, che possa sostenere solo un campo" ("In my poem, I don't allow that excess of *bravura* that the romance welcomes, in which one figure emerges as greater than all the others, capable of defending the battlefield all by himself").²⁵ To this extent, transforming the painting of Mary or the body of Clorinda into singularly protective forces copies the excess of *romanzi* which Tasso claims to avoid. Only the uniting of Goffredo's "compagni erranti" or wandering companions under "i santi segni" can win for the Christians their city (1:1). The liberation of Jerusalem is the work not of women, but of men; and not of a single man, but many.

On the other hand, unlike Goffredo or Rinaldo, these "virtuous" women do indeed disappear from the poem, suffering the fate of the "poco connesso" and summarily excluded from the larger body into which Tasso incorporates his men in the "Allegoria."²⁶ Yet is such exclusion ultimately a penalty? While at work on the *Liberata*, Tasso was penning his brief pastoral play, the *Aminta*, where he experiments with the inaccessibility of a *vergine* in the figure of Silvia, whose own near-violation while tied to a tree is reminiscent, even in its phrasing, of Sofronia's violent torture. The *Liberata*'s "Già 'l velo e 'l casto manto a lei rapito, / stringon le molli braccia aspre ritorte" ("they tear away her veil and her modest cloak, bind hard her tender hands behind the back"; 2.26) echoes Silvia's victimization at the Satyr's hands.²⁷ But the exposure of Silvia's and Sofronia's bodies is in turn contrasted with the degree to which they refuse to be contaminated by the violence that surrounds them even as they are vulnerable to varying interpretations of their sincerity. The fact that following their rescues neither female character is seen again suggests an additional layer of inscrutability, as though Tasso chose to protect the privacy of his *vergini* from those who would compromise their virtue.²⁸ Perhaps only in a world where epic values—the seizing of Jerusalem from the renegade Ismeno and the infidel Turks—are unequivocally positive can Sofronia's premature departure be construed as a *loss*, rather than a gain. The phrase used with respect to the mosque from which Mary's image is taken—"a vile place heaven holds in disdain"—might stand in for the contaminated city as a whole that Sofronia inhabits with other embattled Christians. Tasso's own narrative gesture with regard to all women of "fortezza," Clorinda included, saves them from the bitter militarism that informs the second half of his poem, preserving for them a space offstage—or above it.

But Tasso continued to ponder the ideal relationship of the female body to his epic project, one which would rely on integration rather than separation. Such integration demanded a very different kind of poem from the *Liberata*, whose

Muslim male warriors, if not its women, are diabolical figures from whom the city must be wrested. The *Conquistata* has typically been glossed as a work that celebrates the Counter-Reformation Church in all its militancy. But attentiveness to the new women of the revised poem, beginning with a lamenting Mary who has stepped out of the painting to become a character, may suggest otherwise.²⁹

Death appears in the *Conquistata*'s opening stanza, where the triumphant prolepsis of "compagni erranti" joining together under "santi segni" no longer exists, and where the explicit allusions to the failures of hell, Asia, and Africa to defeat the Crusaders is replaced by a description of how Goffredo's military feats "di morti ingombrò le valli e 'l piano, / e correr fece il mar di sangue misto" ("filled the plains and valleys with the dead, and made the sea run red with blood"). With death, there is mourning—and a world, as Tasso will call it late in the poem, of "femineo pianto" female lament (23:117). And the first evidence of female mourning that we see in Tasso's "poema riformato" is that of the Virgin Mary, who makes a surprising cameo appearance at precisely the moment occupied in the *Liberata* by the episode with Sofronia. Threatened, as before, by the impending arrival of Crusaders, Aladino decides that the Christian community within the walls poses a danger, and in his rage swears to put them all to death. A stolen painting no longer exists to provoke his anger, but almost immediately the *subject* of that painting appears, as Tasso's narrator redirects our gaze from the cowering Christian citizens of Jerusalem to heaven, in two entirely new stanzas:

Holy Compassion, you did not keep your thoughts hidden to yourself, as you gazed down from the celestial and sacred realm onto the site where the King had lain buried, and at his faithful flock. Thus: "Lord," you cried, "help, help—for now I alone am not sufficient to save their lives."

Upon seeing those moist eyes—the eyes that had wept for her Son who died on the cross—the Father said, "now let me turn my attention to their fear"

. . . and the savage man [Aladino] tempers his insane rage.

Non fu 'l pensier, santa Pietate, occulto
a te ne la celeste e sacra reggia,
dove guardavi il luogo in cui sepolto
il Re si giacque, e la fedel sua greggia.
Pero': – Signor, gridasti, aita, aita,
ch'io non basto a salvarli omai la vita.
Vedendo il Padre ruginandosi gli occhi
di lei che pianse in croce estinto il Figlio,
– Vo' – disse – ch'al Timor la cura or tocchi –

. . . .

[e] Tempra dunque il crudel la rabbia insana.

Thanks to this heavenly intervention that happens in the blink of an eye (“ad un girar di ciglio”), Aladino will “temper his rage” by burning the fields where the Crusaders might have found food and by exiling, rather than killing, the faithful—excepting “le vergini”—from Jerusalem, who depart in tears (“gemendo in lagrimosi lutti”; 2: 53). But their laments will not endure for long. When they come upon the Crusaders in their camp, they offer their services to Goffredo and participate, presumably, in the final attack on their former city in the closing cantos of the new poem.

As in Canto 2 of the *Liberata*, we have a threatened community, and once again Mary figures in its protection. But for those familiar with the *Liberata*, this episode in the *Conquistata*'s second canto represents a loss rather than a gain, albeit a puzzling loss. Having omitted the episode of Sofronia that apparently, he, and many of his first readers, found so troubling, Tasso leaves us with the mere shadow of the women who once occupied the status, rightly or wrongly, of Jerusalem's saviors: a mourning mother. When Mary calls upon God to temper Aladino's wrath, she is gazing at a *tomb*: “il luogo in cui sepolto/ il Re si giacque.” Jerusalem is a place of death, both past and imminent, and Mary is not celebrating her son's resurrection, but weeping for his demise on the cross. Her grief is rehearsed again in the following canto in stanzas also new to the *Conquistata*, where it will be shared by other mothers—many of them Muslim. On tapestries which Goffredo shows the two ambassadors who have arrived from the enemy's forces—one of them, Argante, “intrepid warrior” (“intrepido guerriero”; 2: 91)—is the thunderous defeat of Antioch, which the Christians have just taken. Tasso lingers not over the victorious assault on the city but on the artist's attentiveness to women's loss as they watch their sons die below them:

talented artist, you made the faces of their mothers' pallid and pale, for life no longer was welcome to them. From above each one gazed at her dead child, who lay on the earth by enemies oppressed, his head affixed to the enemy lance; and tears bathed their dry cheeks.

And so he created great variety among these images of grief . . .

con viso vi [il maestro accorto] feo pallido e smorto
le madri, a cui la vita allor dispiacque.
D'alto mirò ciascuna il figlio or morto
che tra nemici oppresso in terra giacque,
e'l capo affisso a la nemica lancia;
e di pianto rigò l'arida guancia.

E variò le imagini dolente . . .

(3: 48–9)

The resulting “istoria” tells of a “Città presa, notturno orror, tumulto, / ruine, incendi e peste”, to which the artist adds “Fuga, terror, lutto, e mal fido scampo / . . . e correr feo di sangue il campo” (“A city seized, nocturnal horrors, tumult, ruin, fires

and plague . . . flight, terror, grief, and luckless escape, and he made the field run with blood"; 50).

Argante, the Christians' enemy, is gazing on these images, and one could argue that his perspective inflects the presentation of the tapestries, much as Aeneas's grief in Book 1 colors his reception of the carvings in Carthage that detail the fall of Troy. Yet, elsewhere in the descriptions, we hear of the "pious Goffredo," the "good Beomondo," the "great Riccardo." Moreover, the direct apostrophes to the Christian reader ("Italici e Germani uscir diresti . . ." [2: 17]) suggest that it is Tasso's narrator—and Tasso himself—who lingers over the mournful details. In fact, the singular concentration on the *Conquistata's* women as vehicles of lament suggests that Tasso is far from making their response to loss yet another diabolically tinged inspiration. Riccardo, formerly the warrior Rinaldo, now also has a mother, who like Thetis, emerges from sea-depths to comfort her son when his friend Rupert dies. The prayers of Riccardo in turn are carried by heaven to a female figure who with tearful face ("con lagrimoso volto" 21: 74) asks God, as did Mary much earlier, to bring aid by turning "your pitying face to my warrior" ("al mio guerrier pietoso 'l ciglio"; 72).

But as the scenes of the tapestry suggest, women's presence as mourners is most visible in the sections devoted to Argante, scourge of the Christians, and in the *Conquistata* clearly meant to be a double for Hector from Homer's *Iliad*. To strengthen this parallel with the Homeric poem, Tasso had to give Argante a wife to protest his going out into battle as Andromache did with Hector, and a mother—and a Helen—who will mourn him when he dies.³¹ In the *Liberata*, this "intrepido guerriero" was killed by Tancredi after a bloody duel outside Jerusalem's walls. The wandering Erminia, in love with Tancredi, literally stumbles over the bodies when she is escorting the spy Vafrino back to the Christians' camp, and restores Tancredi to health with pious prayers and herbal medicines. Argante is summarily ignored by the pair until Tancredi insists that they carry his bloody corpse with them to Jerusalem: "non si frodi / o de la sepoltura o de le lodi" (do not deprive him of burial or of praise; 19: 116). But we hear no eulogies, nor do we witness Argante's burial, and he is as arguably isolated in death as in life. The Argante of the *Conquistata* receives a very different fate after he dies at Tancredi's hands. His body is given to the women of Jerusalem, who eulogize him at the close of Canto 23 as husband, father, and son, as well as fierce protector of his city. This last role is given explicitly to him by Erminia, rechristened Nicea in the *Conquistata*, who laments her inability to save him in the plaintive cry "O arti mie fallaci, o falsa spene! / A cui più l'erbe omai raccoglio e porto / da l'ime valli e da l'inculte arene? / Non ti spero veder mai più resorto, / per mia pietosa cura" ("O my fallacious arts, o my false hope! What use now the herbs that I gather and carry from the dark valleys and the hidden sands? I no longer hope to see you risen, saved by my compassionate healing"; 23:126). The woman who in the *Liberata* had collected medicinal herbs for her beloved Tancredi, and who is addressed by him as "*medica mia pietosa*" after she saves him from death, here reproaches herself for having failed to rescue Tancredi's enemy Argante. If

she saved Tancredi and Goffredo—and the Christian cause—in the *Liberata*, here she can confess only her *failed* arts, and in the context of prophetically imagining a future of grief and destruction in the wake of Argante's death: "Sola io non sono al mio dolor; ma sola / veggio, dopo la prima, altre ruine, / altri incendi, altre morti: e grave e stanca, / quest'alma al nuovo duol languisce e manca" ("I'm not alone in my grief, but I alone can see after this first destruction, more ruin, more fiery blazes, more deaths; and tired and heavy, this soul will languish and expire, sickened by new sorrows"; 127).³²

These three weeping women—mother, wife, and friend whose arts cannot save a dead man—integrate Argante not only into the life of the city and the family, but into the future, as the women who survive him imagine their fates as vividly as the female survivors of Hector in the *Iliad* imagine theirs. Or as Argante's wife, Lugeria, laments, "Ne la tenera etate è il figlio ancora, / che generammo al lagrimoso duolo, / tu ed io infelici . . . / non vedrà gli anni in cui virtù s'onora, / Né la fama tua" ("Our son whom you and I—unhappy—conceived only for tearful sorrow is still in his tender years . . . he will see the years in which virtue is bestowed on him, nor will he know your fame" (23:119). For herself, she can envision only "foreign shores" ("lidi estrani") and service in the entourage of some proud, Christian lord. The lines closely follow those of Andromache in the *Iliad*, much as the lament of Argante's mother ("Difendesti la patria, e palme e fregi / n'avesti, or n'hai trafitto il viso e 'l petto"; "You defended our country, and had honors and laurels; now your face and breast are pierced [by a lance]") repeats that of Hecuba in *Iliad* 24. Thus just as in the *Iliad*, as Sheila Murnaghan has written, female lament has the function of tying the hero back into his community, while making it clear that the hero's *kleos* or fame is achieved at women's expense.³³

Such a constitution of a larger, more sorrowful, poem can be allied in turn with Tasso's new relationship to epic. Even for a poet as relentlessly psychoanalyzed as Tasso, the creation in the *Conquistata* of the familial contexts that Tasso may have longed for after the death of his mother, never knew, may come as a surprise.³⁴ Tasso's redefinition of the epic poet in his unfinished *Giudizio del poema riformato*, the last of his critical works, may instead have been in response to those readers of the pirated *Liberata* who complained about the inauthenticity of some of the characters' emotions that drove the poem. In particular, he argues forcefully in the *Giudizio* for the new sentiment he seeks to generate throughout the *Conquistata*: pity, or "la commiserazione e de la purgazione de gli affetti" ("commiseration and purgation of its effects"; 165). With respect to Argante, whom he explicitly declares to have now fashioned as "most similar to Hector" ("similissimo ad Ettore"), he comments,

where Argante earlier was not wretched, now he's completely so, because he's been changed from a foreign and mercenary soldier into the son of a king and a Christian queen, and has become the natural prince of the city: defending his father, loving his wife, and constant in his defense and in his

faith; and so that pity that is denied him by [Christian] law can be granted out of natural and human sentiment.

dove la persona d'Argante prima [nella Liberata] non era miserabile, ora è divenuta miserabilissima, perché di soldato straniero e mercenario è divenuto figliuolo di re e di regina cristiana e principe natural di quella città, difensor del padre, amator de la moglie e costante ne la difesa e ne la fede; e però quella pietà che si nega a la legge si può concedere a la natura ed a l'umanità.
(164)

Arguing against the likes of Dion Crisostomos who complained about the scenes of mourning in Homer ("Defunctum vero memoria honorate non lachrymis" ["the memory of the dead are not honored by tears"]), Tasso strives for a poetics "that is more humane and more appropriate to civil life" ("più umana e più accommodata a la vita civile"), resisting not only Dion but Plato and the Pythagoreans as "too rigid and severe" ("troppo rigida e severa"). Taking sides with that "most excellent Aristotle," Tasso argues for a poetry that will motivate the sentiment of compassion "even for the enemy" ("ancora da' nemici"; 178), and hence for the creation of a human community in which one takes stock not so much of differing religious beliefs, but of the parallels that make all humankind members of a single family. Thus, for example, the king Solimano is to be considered

not as the emperor of the Turks, but as a valorous prince and father of a valorous and compassionate son. . . . If they were deprived of the theological virtues, they did not lack natural virtue, nor those bred by custom.

non come imperator de' Turchi, ma come principe valoroso e padre di valoroso e di pietoso figliuolo . . . quantunque fosser privi de le virtù teologiche, non erano senza le virtù naturali e quelle di costume.
(177)

As a result, as Alain Goddard has observed, Solimano and Argante both now fail to embody "a code of values opposed to that of strict Catholic orthodoxy" ("un code de valeurs opposé à celui de la stricte orthodoxie catholique")³⁵—a failure that unleashes "a tide of ambivalence" despite the ideological claims made throughout for Catholicism's supremacy.

And the figures who help to generate such ambivalence and, in particular, compassion for those with "natural virtues" are largely Tasso's women, as the *Conquistata* shapes not only a new definition of masculinity but a new role for its women.³⁶ Tasso's early readers may have challenged the authenticity of Armida's conversion, the "saintliness" of Sofronia, the status of the missing "imagine," and the rationale for Erminia's midnight foray into the Christian camp, and her supposed selflessness when ministering to a wounded Tancredi.³⁷ The *Conquistata* seems dedicated rather to making female behavior transparent and unquestionably sincere, a sincerity that Erminia/Nicea's rebuke of her "arti

fallaci” confirms. The ubiquitous female mourner, for whom Mary is paradigmatic, embodies the essence of *non*-theatricality, conveying a spiritual intensity which Tasso himself longed to experience as clear from his late *canzone* to the Virgin, “Stava appresso la Croce,” in which he asks Mary to become the guarantor of his own prayerful sincerity: “Fa ch’io del tuo dolor / senta nel cor la forza” (“Grant that I may sense in my own heart the power of your grief”), and later in the poem, “Fa ch’l duol sia verace / e ’l mio pianto sia vero” (“Enable my grief to be authentic, my lament sincere”).³⁸ If—with the exception of Clorinda—there was no place for this expression of commiseration in the *Liberata*, fixated as it was on the triumphant attaining of the city, the *Conquistata* ensures with its weeping mothers and, on occasion, fathers and friends, that we see Jerusalem’s conquest as mixed a blessing as was the defeat of Troy. If the body recognized in the *Liberata*’s “Allegoria” is an exclusively militaristic one, the *corpus* of the *Conquistata* is familial, in which men are humanized, perhaps feminized, through their claims to having mothers, wives, or children. In the meantime, Erminia’s pious arts of healing, Sofronia’s daring sacrifice, and the *immagine* itself—aspects of feminine “artistry” not easily assimilable to this model—are gone.

One final glance at Luca Giordano’s painting may help to clarify the trajectory I have attempted to chart throughout this essay. The interesting detail of Mary’s image, lifted high above the scene of impending death, can be said to resolve for Genova’s Counter-Reformation audience the identity of the “thief” which Tasso had left in abeyance. Clearly the “mano” that perpetrated the theft was that of the queen of Heaven herself, who forcibly intervenes when her image is placed in a mosque, and who exhibits her power by rescuing not only her “immagine” but the brave Sofronia. Giordano restores Mary’s protective *immagine*, letting us “see” it for the first time as he rescues Mary herself from oblivion in a work that makes the exaltation of Christianity derive from her comforting presence. To this extent, the painting confirms the overtly Catholic structure on which the *Conquistata* insisted. But it does so by countering the very notion, emphasized by Mary herself in the *Conquistata*’s new second canto, that she is “not enough now to save their lives” (“io non basto a salvarli omai la vita”).

Perhaps the key word in the passage is “omai”: now, as opposed to some earlier time when Mary presumably *was* sufficient. Reading backward from Mary’s phrase in Canto 2 of the *Conquistata*, one emerges with a nostalgic vision of female sanctity which the *Liberata* never intended to confirm; but a vision which for Tasso may have resided in a not-so-distant past before Trent, found in a work such as the *Divina commedia*, in which the Virgin has power to do more than weep. Her compassion can be said to have generated an entire poem, and it is thanks to her example that Beatrice is able to say to Virgil in *Inferno* 2, “amor mi mosse” (“love moved me and made me speak”). Giordano’s late seventeenth-century painting willfully misreads the *Liberata*, as it envisions a world in which Mary can glowingly transmit her power to the two central women of Canto 2

in the form of light radiating from her painting. The work of art thus comes to possess a divine, unambiguously protective status such as a renegade Christian, the wizard Ismeno, would confer on it—even if Tasso himself would not.³⁹

This was a world that never did exist in the *Liberata*. But that may finally be beside the point. Yet as Tasso tried to create a poem “senza arti fallacy,” newly directed toward the compassionate involvement of all its *personaggi*, Muslims and Christians alike, in the family of the “*vita civile*,” Mary and the women like her enable a different kind of salvation, albeit of a less dramatic kind. If threats of “parlar disgiunto” and episodic discontinuity hang over the *Liberata*; if the three women of Canto 2 both embodied and actualized these threats, once we arrive at the inclusive poem that is the *Conquistata*, the lonely isolation of heroic difference is no longer a danger. And as a result, there are no more female heroes.⁴⁰

Notes

- 1 Tasso, *Lettere*, ed. Guasti, 5: 72; the letter is from July 1591, when he had almost completed the *Conquistata*.
- 2 For a summary of how female characters change in the *Conquistata*, see Goddard, “Du ‘capitano’ au ‘cavalier sovrano,’” 236–38. Also of interest is Picco, “*Or s’indora ed or verdeggia*.”
- 3 See Gigante’s introduction to Tasso’s *Giudicio sovra la Gerusalemme riformata*, xlviii, as well as his discussion of the *Giudicio* and *Conquistata* in *Tasso*, chapter 13.
- 4 That the female figures of the *Liberata* are intriguing mirrors for Tasso himself is not a new argument; particularly in the wake of a feminist criticism that has focused on Armida and Clorinda. In some cases, such as Stephens’ article on Erminia (“Trickster, Textor, Architect, Thief” or Miguel’s “Tasso’s Erminia,” 62–75, a female character’s narrative and artistic capabilities are put forth as convincing evidence for self-portraits of the author/artist.
- 5 For two recent studies devoted to the episode of Sofronia, Giamperi, *Il battesimo di Clorinda* and Yavneh, “*Dal rogo alle nozze*,” 270–94; also see the few pages dedicated to Sofronia in Hampton’s *Writing from History*, 116–18.
- 6 Some early readers of the *Liberata* considered the episode “poco connesso e troppo presto,” a point with which Tasso concurred; e.g., the letter to Scipione Gonzaga from April 3, 1576; *Lettere di Torquato Tasso*, vol. I, letter #61; 153. Molinari’s edition of the *Lettere poetiche* of Tasso contains this letter with ample critical text; 374. The debate over the episode went on for a period of many months in 1575 and 1576; see the excellent account of Güntert, *L’epos dell’ideologia regnante*, 81–85.
- 7 The syntactic “difetto” or defect that Tasso claims he learned from reading too much Virgil is that of “parlar disgiunto”: “cioè, quello che si lega più tosto per l’unione e dipendenza de’ sensi, che per copula o altra congiunzione di parole . . . pur ha molte volte sembianza di virtù, ed è talora virtù apportatrice di grandezza: ma l’errore consiste ne la frequenza. Questo difetto ho io appreso de la continua lezione di Virgilio . . .” (*Lettere*, vol. I, 115). Fortini calls attention to the symptomatic crisis of “parlar disgiunto” in relationship to Canto 2 in *Dialoghi col Tasso*, 81, describing it as “la frattura degli elementi del discorso per ottenere maggior rilievo, maggiore drammatizzazione e magnificenza.”
- 8 Tasso’s references to Homer in his *Giudicio* are extensive, as are his spirited defenses of Homer against those who would call him a liar; he often invokes Aristotle’s praise of the poet.
- 9 On Tasso’s impact on and interest in the visual arts more generally, see Waterhouse, “Tasso and the Visual Arts,” 146–61 and, more recently, Unglaub’s *Poussin and the Poetics of Painting* and Traherne’s “Pictorial Space and Sacred Time,” 5–25.

- 10 The image is item 176 in the catalogue *Luca Giordano*, ed. Ferrari and Scavizzi.
- 11 See Uttili's entry on Giordano's *Olindo e Sofronia* in *Torquato Tasso*, 313.
- 12 From the letter to Scipione Gonzaga of April 3, 1576; in *Lettere di Torquato Tasso*, 153; *Lettere poetiche*, 374. This came less than a month after Tasso had informed Luca Scalabrino on March 12, that he was going to add "eight or ten stanzas" to the end of the Sofronia episode, in the hope of making it seem "more connected" ("che 'l farà parer più connesso"); *ibid.*, 339.
- 13 I use the edition of Fredi Chiappelli; II: 6.
- 14 Translations of the *Liberata* are from *Jerusalem Delivered*, trans. Esolen; occasionally modified.
- 15 *Lettere*, I, 164; also in *Letter poetiche*, 406; italics mine.
- 16 Yavneh, "Dal rogo alle nozze," 272–73.
- 17 Giampieri, *Il battesimo di Clorinda*, 27, has noted in the "casto simulacro" of Mary a parallel with the famous Palladium of Troy: Mary's image takes the place of the Palladium, and this substitution is extended further when Sofronia herself "porta quella salvezza che tutti si aspettavano dall'efige della Madonna" once the Madonna is gone.
- 18 See Yavneh, "Dal rogo alle nozze," 150, as well as Warner, *The Augustinian Epic*, 86.
- 19 This line is echoed by Armida eighteen cantos later, when she proclaims herself Rinaldo's "ancilla," and observes that his word is her law: "e le fia legge il cenno" (20: 136). Intentionally or not, the line brings us full circle to the missing image of Mary, but reducing the supposed potency of that image and the women who mirror it to a gesture of submission to a "conquering" Gabriel.
- 20 Virgil, *Eclogues*, *Georgics*, *Aeneid I–VI*, 441.
- 21 The Judith echoes are relevant as well, on which see Refini, "Giuditta, Armida e il velo," esp. 87–88. But unlike Judith, who dominates the second half of the apocryphal book of Judith, Sofronia and Clorinda disappear long before the ending.
- 22 "A lei, che generosa è quanto onesta, / viene in pensier come salvar costoro. / Move fortezza il gran pensier, l'arresta / poi la vergogna e 'l verginal decoro; / vince fortezza, anzi s'accorda e face / sé vergognosa e la vergogna audace" (2: 17).
- 23 Eugenio Donadoni remarked on Tasso's "incapacità di ritrarre una santa," and while he doesn't elaborate, he clearly has in mind the puzzling presentation of Sofronia herself. *Torquato Tasso*, 324.
- 24 As Lawrence F. Rhu nicely puts it, the "Allegoria," first composed in 1576, probably functioned "as a guarantor of acceptable intentions in the face of potential censorship . . . rather than as a sure guide in the right direction for a comprehensive interpretation of his poem"; *The Genesis of Tasso's Narrative Theory*, 56. At the same time, with regard to the conflict between the "one and the many," the poem, with its announced attention to bring together Goffredo and his "compagni erranti," and the Allegoria, focused on demonstrating how the bodies of the (male) warriors are eventually incorporated within the body of the army, seemingly speak with a single voice.
- 25 *Lettere*, vol. 1, 84. Interestingly, Tasso will exempt Rinaldo from this rule.
- 26 On the possibility that Tasso resists making his female warriors stronger than the men, see Günsberg, *The Epic Rhetoric of Tasso*, 128: "female valour is described essentially in terms of negative comparatives. This culminates in male supremacy over a femininity that is already fragmented, and in an act characterized by sexual overtones"—such as the deaths of Clorinda and Gildippe.
- 27 See Act III, scene 1, from *Aminta*, and Tirsi's description of the Satiro's would-be rape of Silvia: She is tied with her own hair, to a tree, while "'l suo bel cinto, / che del sen virginal fu pria custode, / di quello stupro era ministro, ed ambe / le mani al duro tronco le sstringea; / e la pianta medesima avea prestati / legami contra lei . . .';" lines 1237–42; from *Opere di Torquato Tasso*, Volume 5: *Aminta e rime scelte*.
- 28 For a more sustained reading of the *Aminta* and Tasso's protectiveness of his two main characters, see my chapter in *Writing and Vulnerability*, 82–95.
- 29 In truth, a more nuanced criticism of the *Conquistata* has emerged in recent years, including that of Goddard and of Residori, *L'idea del poema*, as well as in the recent article of Brazeau, "Who Wants to Live Forever?" Yet critics have been overly hasty to dismiss the

- later poem as the project of Tasso's new Counter-Reformation orthodoxy. This may be the case, but surely only in part; as the *Giudicio* and contemporary letters attest, Tasso was involved in a continuing dialogue with ancient authors, and the *Conquistata* attests to his desire to write a poem that creates more of a balance between opposing forces.
- 30 *Gerusalemme conquistata*, II: 11–12. Luigi Bonfigli's edition, which comprises part of his five-volume *Opere di Torquato Tasso*, regrettably has no notes; there is still no fully annotated modern version of the poem.
 - 31 Shortly after Argante's death a trio of female mourners lament his loss in a passage taken directly from *Iliad* 24; the fact that they appear in the *Conquistata*'s twenty-third canto makes the connection structural as well as thematic.
 - 32 See Stephens, "Trickster, Textor, Architect, Thief," on Erminia, in which he talks about Erminia's imitation of Helen; while he finds in the *Conquistata* allusions to Helen's weaving (Canto 3), he does not consider the Homeric echoes in Canto 23. Also see my "Imagining Narrative in Tasso."
 - 33 Murnaghan, "The Poetics of Loss in Greek Epic," 217: "As she gives voice to her role as the bearer of Hector's *kleos*, Andromache's words fill in what Hector's gloss over . . . [she] insists that the creation of *kleos* begins with grief for the hero's friends and enemies alike. . . . Before it can be converted into pleasant, care-dispelling song, a hero's achievement is measured in the suffering that it causes, in the grief that it inspires."
 - 34 Ferguson's *Trials of Desire* and Enterline, *The Tears of Narcissus* explore psychoanalytic material.
 - 35 Goddard, "Du 'capitano' au 'cavalier sovrano,'" 240n.
 - 36 I want here to make note of Konrad Eisenbichler's suggestive work with respect to new versions of masculinity articulated in early modern Europe, and especially to his generous support of the volume that Gerry Milligan and I edited for his series at the University of Toronto, *The Poetics of Masculinity in Early Modern Italy and Spain* (Toronto: Centre for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 2010).
 - 37 The letters that take up these various episodes, surely to be read in the larger context of Tasso's *oeuvre*, include a majority of the letters in Molinari's *Lettere poetiche*, which date from March 1575 through July 1576.
 - 38 *Opere di Torquato Tasso*, vol. V, 583.
 - 39 See Traherne, "Pictorial Space and Sacred Time," for a bracing discussion as to why Tasso refused to indulge in any *ekphrasis* of sacred images in his work—as in his late poem, *Lagrime*.
 - 40 In the *Conquistata*, Tasso adds eight stanzas (15: 41–8) representing a prophetic dream regarding Clorinda's future baptism as a Christian—a future less certain in the *Liberata*, when a number of verbs suggest the possibility of an only apparent conversion ("pare," "sembra," etc.).

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